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**Explorations by middle leaders in secondary schools of
their professional networks and relationships,
analysed against a framework of
capital, agency, and resilience.**

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**Thesis submitted to the University of Cumbria for the Degree of Doctor
of Philosophy**

79,515 words

July 2021

Declaration

I, Lisa Reed, declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

The word count of 79,515 excluding bibliography does not exceed the maximum allowed.

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My thanks, first off, go to my participants for agreeing to be part of my study and for their honest and candid responses in the interview and to the questionnaires. Without this, the narratives in my study would not reflect the variation of experiences and provide the insight in the way they have, to show what it looks like to be a middle leader in secondary schools in England.

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Abstract

Set against a backdrop of neoliberalism and the subsequent changes within the landscape of schooling in England, the intention of this study was to explore the lived experiences of middle leaders in secondary schools. These were captured through an exploration of the networks and professional relationships of seven middle leaders, using a combination of questionnaire, interview, and field-note data, which resulted in a constructed narrative of their experiences.

Grounded in interpretivism with social constructionism and combined with a third philosophical position of critical subjectivity, the study captured the interpretations of the participants as they explored their networks and relationships. The constructed narratives were analysed, using a thematic narrative approach, against the constructs of capital, agency, and resilience. The purpose of this was to understand how information flows through the middle leaders' networks, the way this impacts on their sense of control and autonomy, and how this influences their motivation and commitment to their role.

The findings indicated the wide variation of experiences across the middle leaders and the ways they drew from the emotional support in their reciprocal and trusted relationships with family, friends, and colleagues. The level of sharing throughout the networks was surprising and the way this influenced the sense of agency and ability to enact change are a significant contribution to our understanding of the influence relationships and networks have as schools manage the political landscape of curriculum change and inspection reforms. These findings, and those around the 'darker side' of relationships through social control within school structures, should be of interest to those working within education, whether this be school leaders, teachers, or policy makers, as we understand what influences the motivation and commitment for people to stay and thrive within our schools.

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1. Chapter 1 Setting the Scene

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide a rationale to the background context of the study, which is situated within secondary schooling in England. The chapter begins with a section headed 'Why Now?' with the purpose of describing the developments of educational policy in England and explaining the impacts of these on teacher retention and well-being. The climate, created through decades of Government intervention and change, is one of the influencing factors of the need for this thesis, especially as the use of the term resilience has become widely accepted as a requirement in teaching. As a teacher myself, it is important to explain how I see myself within the context of the study. The next section of the chapter is titled 'My Place in the Study' and focuses on my own bias and knowledge of the educational landscape and what has motivated me to conduct this doctoral research. As the study is focused exclusively on teachers in middle-leadership, the aim of the next section 'Why Middle Leaders?' outlines the rationale behind this and provides a backdrop to understanding the term 'middle leader'; its use by the government and why as a sub-set of the teaching profession they can provide an important insight into the working environments within and across schools. The section 'The Purpose of the Study' maps an introduction to the areas of seminal and current literature which are considered of significance for the study and presents the research questions the study aims to answer, along with the intentions for the contribution of the subsequent findings. The chapter concludes with an overview of the upcoming chapters and the thesis outline.

1.2 Why Now?

Since the 1988 Educational Reform Act in England and the introduction of neo-liberal policies through successive governments, education has seen the rise in accountability through quasi-markets directing parental choice (Ball, 2017, pg. 15). League tables focusing on student performance measured through exam results and school ratings following inspections have led to an increased level of high-stakes classroom observations and accountability of pupil outcome data (Furlong, 2013, pg. 33). In addition to the current climate of exposure through observation and accountability, workload is often cited as the most influential reason for teachers leaving the profession (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2011, pg. 1029). As a schoolteacher myself, I have witnessed and experienced the effects of the current workplace environment on well-being and the maintaining of commitment within the profession. According to data retrieved from House of Commons publications and Education Policy Institute reports, the rising levels of workload and accountability have resulted in reports of potentially unsustainable levels of stress and burnout experienced by teachers (House of Commons, 2012; House of Commons, 2017; Education Policy Institute, 2016).

Currently in England, the proportion of teachers leaving the profession other than through retirement had risen to 8% in 2015, an increase from 6% in 2010. With an average of 20% of newly qualified teachers not in regular service in state-funded schools after two years which rises to 30% within five years, the data suggests a downward trend in the rates of teacher retention and the number of new teachers being recorded falls short of government targets (Department for Education, 2016; House of Commons, 2017; Worth & De Lazzari, 2017); this combined with the

projected increase in pupil numbers over the next fifteen years, it means that those concerned with teacher supply are interested in reducing attrition (House of Commons, 2017).

Whilst there is a considerable amount of empirical research focused on newly qualified teachers and leadership within education, there is an apparent gap in the working experiences of middle leaders in schools (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012, pg. 57). This group of teachers have, despite the increasing rate of attrition amongst their colleagues, managed to forge a route through the workload and accountability pressures as well as taking on additional responsibilities (Ruding, 2000, pg. 190). Therefore, they could provide an insight into approaches and outlooks that could benefit the profession, not only in terms of retention (Department for Education, 2016; Worth & De Lazzari, 2017) but also a wider understanding of the working practices across schools.

1.3 My Place in the Study

As a secondary school teacher in England for twenty years, I have experienced a considerable amount of change within education. Throughout this time, I have taught in three English state secondary schools, where I have witnessed several changes to the structure of schooling through a variety of government policies and initiatives. These include the development of the Academy structure, where state funded schools are allowed more autonomy over areas such as curriculum. This development evolved into Multi-Academy Trusts, where groups of academy schools would be collectively managed through a single trust (Simon, James, & Simon, 2021, pg. 113). Alongside these evolutions, there have been changes in focus from The Office for Standards in

Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) who are the inspectorate for state funded schools in England. These changes were implemented with a desire to appear more transparent, consultative, and collaborative with the teaching profession and have resulted in several alternative inspection frameworks in a short space of time (Colman, 2021, pg. 269). Combined with the Government policy developments giving rise to an 'apparent' increase level of autonomy to schools and specifically Head Teachers and latterly Chief Executives of Academy Trusts and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), this has resulted in, metaphorically speaking, a conveyor belt of 'improvement' drives, with a relentless schedule for delivery (Simon et al., 2021, pg. 114). From my own perspective at a classroom level, it is through observing the impacts of these developments in the macro- and meso-levels of the educational landscape on the micro-level of the department and classroom, which sparked my initial motivation to pursue a doctorate.

My study is designed solely around the perspectives of the participant middle leaders with an exploration of their networks and professional relationships, which are analysed against the constructs of capital, agency, and resilience. It was important for me to recognise the extent of internal bias and the influence of my experience and knowledge as a teacher, not only the analysis, but also on the direction of the constructed narratives of the participants. Therefore, part of my methodological approach across the study included that of critical subjectivity which enabled me to embrace, rather than suppress the perspective of knowing (Reason, 1999, pg. 212) and I explore this in more detail in chapter 3.

1.4 Why Middle Leaders?

The term middle leader, according to the Department for Education teacher workforce census, could refer to teachers who are classroom teachers, advisory teachers, or lead practitioners (Department for Education, 2018). They define middle leaders as ‘teachers (such as head of year or head of subject) who were mostly teaching in the classroom but not in a more formal leadership position such as assistant or deputy headteacher’ (ibid., pg. 12). Whilst there is a contention between the term ‘middle leader’ and ‘middle manager’ within the literature (see Irvine and Brundrett, 2017, pg. 2), I will adopt the leadership title throughout my thesis as this reflects the terminology present within the current governmental descriptors (see Department for Education, 2018, pg. 12).

In 2016 the Teacher Workforce Census (Department for Education, 2018) revealed there were 457,300 teachers working across the 21,920 state schools in England, teaching a total of 7.9 million pupils. This represents a rise of 7.5% in pupil numbers since 2010, yet only a 3.5% rise in full-time teachers for the same period across all sectors. This disparity between pupil and teacher numbers emphasises the concern over teacher shortfalls and the need to focus on recruitment and retention suggested in 1.2. Returning to the data for the secondary sector, there was a drop of 11% in classroom teacher numbers, yet an increase of 2.2% in leadership positions from 2010 to 2016 (Department for Education, 2018). This rise is most prominent across both the middle and assistant levels of the leadership hierarchy that exists in many state-funded schools in England (Department for Education, 2018). Whilst the significance of the changing dynamic of middle leader numbers and school populations is not

directly addressed through the focus of my study, this increase may suggest a perceived need for leadership which acts as the bridge between the strategic vision of the Head Teacher and the delivery of the curriculum in the classroom (Ruding, 2000, pg. 2).

Gurr and Drysdale (2012, pg. 57) suggest that middle leaders occupy structural positions between senior leaders and classroom teachers, described by Irvine and Drysdale (2016, pg. 90) as 'piggy in the middle'. Consequently, they attract a range of responsibilities that are often 'complex and ambiguous' (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012, pg. 57). This bridge, according to Irvine and Brundrett (2017, pg. 2), can often be 'uncomfortable' due to middle leaders being 'squeezed between the conflicting requirements of the senior leadership team and their department colleagues'. Therefore, they are leaders in one context and followers in another and this means they are members of a variety of communities both inside and outside of school (ibid.). The unique position, through this extended membership and the channel of communication between the senior leaders and classroom teachers (Brown, Boyle & Boyle, 1999, pg. 321), means the participants could provide an important insight into the role of networks and relationships across whole school structures.

1.5 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study is to explore, with the middle leader participants, their networks, and professional relationships. I referred in 1.4 to the rise in middle leadership numbers within the hierarchy of school leadership and their function as a bridge between the front-line dynamic of classroom teaching with the strategic level of senior leadership. As the Senior Leadership Team in schools are responsible for the

implementation of Government policy and OFSTED frameworks of inspection, middle leadership can result in pressures in the line management of departmental teams (Bennett, Woods, Wise & Newton, 2007, pg. 454). These pressures also include decisions over curriculum and implementations of behavioral and assessment policies, whilst managing elevated levels of stress through accountability to senior leaders on student results and attainment (ibid.). This is also apparent in the response from some school leaders to OFSTED inspections, which can result in a demand for strict policy driven practices within their schools, termed hyper-enactment of policy by Colman (2021, pg. 269) as she considers this to be an excessive response to school inspections. Therefore, this study aims to gain an insight into how middle leaders assist with the negotiation of this landscape through the dynamic of their professional networks, the connections within them, and the flow of resources through them.

Ball (2017, pg. 161) suggests that teachers, working within a hyper-accountability, neo-liberal policy context regardless of additional leadership responsibilities, perform complex and challenging roles whilst carrying heavy workloads. Through the literature, I have taken a principal position that maintaining a commitment, despite the adverse or challenging conditions described above, is a fundamental characteristic of 'resilience' (Brunetti, 2006, pg. 813). However, it has been argued that resilience is not a personal trait of 'bounce-back-ability' but a socially connected construct which is strengthened through supportive relationships or networks (Allison, 2011, pg. 80). Gu (2014, pg. 503) identified this 'relational resilience' as a useful element in the resilience of school leaders and teachers, which has become a central focus for my study, by using relationships as a way of exploring the influences on commitment and motivation within teaching.

When considering relationships and the complexity involved within the nature of the relationships and networks, they are widely accepted to involve the exchange of many forms such as: knowledge, resources, trust, and support (Carrasco, Hogan, Wellman & Miller, 2008; Thomas & Neisz, 2012; Wellman & Frank, 2008). It is also widely acknowledged that this exchange takes place within friendships, professional discussions, and collaborative projects as well as across communities and institutions (Adger, 2000; Cassidy & Barnes, 2012). Therefore, the framework for this study has adopted the construct of 'capital' to illustrate the nuances of the exchanges of the middle leaders within their networks. This is also, crucially, to express the impact of the experiences on the participants in their outlook on their agency, which Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) describe as professional capital. However, Bandura (1982; 1989) considered the influence of self-belief which can arise through the capture of knowledge. This would suggest that cultural capital, considered as the reproduction of knowledge, can influence self-efficacy, which from an agentic perspective, is the control that a person feels over their own lives (Bandura, 1989, pg. 1176). Therefore, my study also considers the role of agency, the extent of responsibility allowed upon individuals (Archer, 1988, pg. 273), and distinguishes between that which is observable through personal expression and that which is prescribed from senior leadership and policy. This also extends to the ways the middle leaders in my study consider they have control over the decisions which influence their working practices and that of their departments or areas of responsibility (Smith, 2013, pg. 566).

This interplay between 'capital' and 'agency' are important constructs in the aims of the study to explore the impacts of networks and professional relationships of the middle leaders. However, I did feel a sense of frustration that resilience, despite a

large body of research, remained an abstract construct that had conflicting notions which spanned a wide continuum across the individual, the relational and the social. Day and Hong (2016, pg. 117) described resilience as a latent capacity and as a teacher of Chemistry, this description held a significant resonance because 'latent capacity' is a resource which will allow a system to maintain equilibrium despite adverse conditions. This 'systems' perspective of resilience allowed me to visualise how the interconnection between capital, agency and resilience would be accessible within a framework that could be used in a concrete way when analysing the narratives and nuances of the interview data. It also had the potential for adaptation across settings as a system can apply to an individual, a group, community, or institution (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014, pg. 215).

1.6 Research Questions

Using this framework, through connecting these factors of capital, agency, and resilience, I have sought to answer the following questions:

1. Who do middle leaders include in their professional networks and why?
2. In what ways do middle leaders use their network contacts and what is the nature of the exchanges between them?
3. How do the interactions within the networks influence the middle leaders' sense of agency in their roles?
4. To what extent does the contribution that their networks make affect their resilience within the workplace?

I intend to offer, through generating authentic and rich dialogue with the participants, an insight of how professional relationships and networks can influence commitment

and motivation within the workplace. This has important implications for the future contribution to workplace well-being and in the context of education, in what could be considered the near crisis point of recruitment and retention of teachers.

1.7 Overall Structure of the Thesis

The following structure of the thesis is organised to answer the research questions detailed in 1.6 through capturing the lived experiences of the participants. Chapter 2 details the literature around the areas of social networks in education and considers this in the context of professional learning communities (PLCs). Chapter 2 also explores the literature surrounding the constructs of capital, agency, and resilience in the context of teachers to establish a framework with which to analyse the narratives of the participants in the study. Chapter 3 explains my methodological positions of the study and the epistemological dilemmas faced from a wholly qualitative social science study. I explain my ethical approaches in the study and discuss the appropriateness of the participants to capture a range of voices. Chapter 3 finishes with a discussion of the methods I adopted to capture authentic narratives of the participants and my form of analysis to maintain a visibility of the participants through the interpretative approach of the study. Chapters 4 and 5 present the analysis and discussion of the participants narratives, where chapter 4 focuses on each participant and chapter 5 presents the collective interpretations against each of the four research questions. The thesis ends with chapter 6 which details the conclusions of my study and presents the contribution the thesis makes to the wider conversation around teacher retention and wellbeing, whilst also detailing my recommendations for practice and future research.

2. Chapter 2 Framework from the Literature

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present and explore the literature around the context of this thesis. The chapter follows the order of the four research questions, which are referenced in each of the sections below, and forms the framework for analysis in my study.

The structure of networks and the flow of resources through a network are important in the study. Therefore, using Daly as a guide, the chapter begins with an examination of the literature around social network theory and educational change. Social networks have been shown to be influential in the construction and sharing of knowledge and can have a wider contribution as a builder of agency. As such the work of Wellman, and others, play a pivotal role in the review of the literature in this section.

The 'resources', such as knowledge or support, which are contained and flow through the network are considered a form of 'capital'. Therefore, the chapter continues with a brief discussion on the influence of human-capital theory by the economists Becker and Schultz. A central theme of social and cultural relations runs throughout this thesis therefore the seminal works of Bourdieu, especially on the role of *habitus* and the social reproduction in the group are considered in detail. Coleman's theories are explored alongside the work of Portes and Lin, amongst others, around the influence of the interpersonal ties through an exploration of the social mechanisms and the collective assets held within networks as social capital. There is an exploration of

where the networks can be considered closed or open in conjunction with Bourdieu's cultural capital and how this can result in a level of social control, as described by Field, who considers the 'dark side' of social capital. This section of the literature concludes with work of Hargreaves and Fullan on the combined capital theory of professional capital and this collective of work is considered from the perspective of a link between knowledge and expertise, into a sense of belief, ability and control in one's own role and working life.

Bandura considers self-efficacy from an agentic perspective and therefore, the literature is now considered around the varying positions of agency. The works of Archer are considered here, especially in the context of her position on social theory and the contribution of culture and structure on the sense of agency experienced by individuals. Whilst Bourdieu was considered in the previous section of capital, his work on *habitus* has many overlaps with Archer's Morphogenesis both of which, when considered alongside the work of many others, build a strong sense of the role of the social in the influence of an agentic perspective. This I would consider to be collective as well as individual, which is explored in the context of Teacher Agency and the 'relational resources', suggested by Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2016, pg. 152), that are embedded in relationships and networks.

My thesis is considering the contribution of networks and professional relationships to the working lives of middle leaders using the constructs of capital and agency to aid analysis and considers the influence of these on the resilience of the participants. Because of this the literature briefly explores the factors of burnout and stress which lead into considerations of the varying positions of resilience: as psychological, as a

social construct, from a relational perspective and finally from a systems position using 'latent capacity' to explore a capitalist concept of resilience. Day and Gu are explored in detail around the conversation of resilience in teaching and Brunetti contributes here with his studies in the United States. Both Brunetti, and Day and Gu describe resilience as 'staying the course' or 'maintaining a motivation and commitment' and this thesis also takes this position. As I am exploring the activity of networks and professional relationships, the role of relational resilience is considered within the literature on community resilience studies which leads onto the work on resilience from the perspective of the group and organisations, where resilience is often described as the backup for tough or high demand times. This was defined by Day and Hong (2016, pg. 117) as a 'latent capacity' and I use the literature here to illustrate this from a 'capital' position in that the reserve tank of resilience is both deposited into and withdrawn from to maintain an equilibrium, which echoes the metaphorical use of capital introduced earlier in the chapter.

2.2 Social Networks

This first section of the literature review serves two purposes: to layout the relevant literature in response to the first research question 'Who do middle leaders include in their professional networks and why?' and to set the scene for the thesis on the significance and importance of social networks.

2.2.1 Social Network Theory and Education

The study of social networks has increased in popularity over recent years as a methodology for social and behavioural researchers in understanding the mechanisms

for social change and human development (Daly, 2015, pg. 1). Sociologists and other researchers interested in social and human psychology and behaviour have continued to research social groups and circles, resulting in the emergence of social network data showing that relational structures matter (Pichler & Wallace, 2009, pg. 321). Understanding the social network structure allows for the visualisation and characterisation of the patterns of behaviours in the relationships of individuals, where these patterns of behaviour, as well as the positions in the social structure, have influence on the outcomes for individuals (Borgatti, Mehra, Brass & Labianca, 2009, pg. 892). This suggests the social network can be considered a relational system, composed of social actors and their interactions which Daly (2015, pg. 4) describes as: ‘...a group of actors who are connected to one another through a set of different relations or ties. Communication, knowledge, innovation, or any number of resources can flow through channels between actors.’ Therefore, the influence on outcomes for the members of the network is the result of the connections between them and the ability to exchange and share information.

Social Network Theory is identifying the pattern of the relationships between individuals, groups, organisations, or systems (Moolenaar & Daly, 2012, pg. 2). Daly (2015, p. 4) suggests social network methods ‘...reveal the underlying structures through which resources are exchanged between individuals in an organisation.’ Therefore, understanding the mechanisms within which people meet and socialise to connect and communicate, as well as the reasons why particular individuals are chosen and their relationships are maintained over time, allow us to understand in more detail the nature and impact of human interactions (Merchant, 2012, pg. 6). However, it is not necessarily the size of the network, but the strength and reciprocity

of the relationships between the individuals involved which hold the greatest influence (Henwood, Stefancic, Petering & Schreiber, 2015, pg. 399). In fact, studies on isolation suggest that it is the lack of these qualities within relationships which can contribute significantly to the psychological well-being on the individuals affected (Crotty, Henderson, Ward, Fuller, Rogers, Kralik & Gregory, 2015; Woolcott, Keast, Tsasis, Lipina & Chamberlain, 2019).

For Daly (2015, pg. 1), the social network provides relational support which results in increased retention and professionalism amongst teachers. Therefore, social networks can be drivers for change however, where the network may have been once considered from the perspective of 'it isn't what you know, but who you know', Daly (2015, pg. 2) now suggests, following the decades of work in social network analysis, that a more accurate description would be 'who you know defines what you know'. This distinction is subtle yet significant as it indicates that the social network is not limited to access into others' expertise, knowledge or skills, but rather an individuals' own expertise, knowledge, and skills can be enhanced through the ties in the network.

There are many studies in education which recognise the significance of the social network on systemic improvement, and educational policy and practice (see Moolenaar & Daly, 2012). This rise in awareness of the emergence of social networks and networking could be considered a societal phenomenon and the awareness of the importance of networks is witnessed in many workplaces, not least of all schools (Baker-Doyle, 2011, pg. 3). Daly, Moolenaar, Bolivar & Burke (2010, pg. 360) argue for the promotion of social networks within school culture to promote reform and enact change. Whilst the benefits of networks in workplace learning and reform are

recognised and espoused within the literature, the strategic factors which promote the formation of effective networks are not so apparent (Eraut, 2007, pg. 404). In fact, Frankham (2006, pg. 674) called for a pause on the explosion of networks which she considered to be the 'silver bullet' of yet another panacea in educational reform and Riles (2000, pg. 3) referred to this as an 'institutionalised utopia'. This criticism of the use of networks is not directed at the social network itself but at the associated meanings and metaphors and idealised view of the impact of the network (Frankham, 2006, pg. 661). It is within this use of metaphors that the network is associated with communities and the sense of community is a persuasive term as it is grounded in a sense of the 'common good', but it is now combined with a sense of providing individual gain (Frankham, 2006, pg. 669). The promotion and discourse around the 'learning networks' in education is what Frankham considered not to be adequate enough to warrant their promotion. Yet, Thomas and Niesz (2012, pg. 684), in their study on how social networks impact on curriculum and policy, considered them to be a 'novelty' because teaching is a profession which can be renowned for its isolation, and occurs mainly 'behind closed doors' (Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson, 2016, pg. 162).

The presence of the social network cannot be ignored as connection is an innate human activity (Deci & Ryan, 2000, pg. 231). However, what has become a social phenomenon is the rise of awareness and promotion of social networks and networking and the perceived influence on forming relationships, providing access into employment, and other opportunities (Baker-Doyle, 2011, pg. 14). Castells (2000) highlighted the new awareness of connectivity through the internet and use of technologies in the rise of the language around 'networks'. It is this use of language

around networks which Frankham (2006, pg. 662) considers ‘...‘network talk’- connection, communication, compatibility, and flow being central metaphors’ which are the result of the transition from electronic technologies and platforms to the social field of individuals. The use of utilising a network for communication and collaboration may have been initiated through technology, however the promotion of the work in social network analysis has led to a new language around a ‘knowledge economy’ in the increased exchange of information across contexts between individuals, communities, businesses, and organisations (Cross, Parker, Prusak & Borgatti, 2003, pg. 100). However, Wellman (1988, pg. 19) is critical of the use of language around networks that: ‘...some use “network” as a verb and “networking” as a noun to advocate the deliberate creation and use of social networks for desired ends such as getting jobs or integrating communities.’ A verb indicates action whereas a noun refers to a subject, such as a person, place or object and yet, whilst networking would be considered an action, it is the network which is considered as active. This, combined with ‘deliberate creation’ for ‘desired ends’, suggests this use of networks could reflect the frustration of Frankham (2006) for the prevalence of networks as solutions to problems within education.

Within my study, I am capturing the lived experiences of the teachers through understanding what is occurring within the networks. For example: who decides what happens in teacher networks; what are the social and learning processes taking place; to what extent is there a sharing of knowledge and does this have an impact on agency-building for the participants (Thomas & Niesz, 2012, pg. 684). Indeed, the first research question in my study: ‘who do middle-leaders include in their professional networks and why?’ is actually a very simplified call to action in understanding the

landscape and structure of the participants' network and its distribution in terms of the nature of the relationships and the dynamics involved. Having explored the issues around social network theory in the context of education and, before I consider in more detail the role and impact of Professional Learning Communities, I will discuss the structure of the social network and its influence in my study.

2.2.2 The Structure of the Social Network

Connections are an essential facet of social life and social structure, and social networks are the structures which offer opportunities and constraints for those entwined within them (Crossley et al., 2015, pg. 3). People contained within a network can have many labels and as such can be grouped into collectives, for example, in my study the participants are all teachers with leadership responsibilities for subject and pastoral departments in schools and therefore, grouped together as 'middle leaders'. However, within this group there will be further sub-groups: the type of institutions, the subject disciplines, their contracted hours, or additional responsibilities.

According to Wellman (2001, pg. 227) people may be labelled into groups, but they exist in networks. Palla, Derenyi, Farkas and Vicsek (2005, pg. 814) characterise networks as 'overlapping communities', and emphasise the way networks can be considered a 'complicated web' of interconnecting communities due to the multiplicity of connections each member holds (ibid.). McMillan and Chavis (1986, pg. 9) define community in terms of 'a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together.' These elements of community Rovai (2002, pg. 321) summarises as: 'mutual

interdependence, connectedness, trust, interactivity, and shared values and goals’.

These elements have significance in my study as I explore how the middle leaders connect with the communities in their networks and the impacts these have for them.

The ways that people use their networks can be multi-faceted (ibid.) and studies have shown that they can be used as drivers for change through the construction and sharing of knowledge as well as identity and agency builders (Carrasco et al., 2008; Wellman & Frank, 2008). Therefore, establishing the flow of resources through a network is important considering the influence this can have, and understanding this exchange of resource and the impact on agency for the teacher is a key component in my study and discussed in more detail in sections 2.3 and 2.4. Whilst there are social network analysis and resilience studies (see Cassidy & Barnes, 2012) much of this research revolves around human and social geography and the sustainability of communities (for example Adger, 2000). However, there are some studies which have explored teacher networks and the exchange of capital within them (Van Waes, Moolenaar, Daly, Heldens, Donche, Van Petergem & Van den Bossche, 2016) and these empirical network studies on teacher communities and many aspects of their research design have resonance within my study. Indeed, as discussed in 2.6 in the review of literature on resilience, the flow of resources or ‘capital’ was a concept which was referred to in the discussions relating to the nature and exchange of interactions within networks (Plickert, Cote, and Wellman, 2007, pg. 406).

From the social network literature presented so far, it is apparent that network studies have yielded a significant amount of knowledge around the positive impacts of the social network across many fields of interest, including education. Therefore, to fully

answer the research question around ‘who do the participants include in their network and why?’, it is important to understand broadly the nature of the social network structure to establish its application within this study.

Across Social Network Analysis, there are two forms of social network mapping structure which broadly exist: one form is whole networks maps, known as sociometric analysis, which consider community level networks or networks across organisations; the other focuses on personal networks, known as egocentric analysis, which consider the smaller networks which surround individuals (Wellman, 1988, pg. 27). Both mapping structures are useful for understanding the mechanisms and processes for social change (Rice & Yoshioka-Maxwell, 2015, pg. 371). They allow for multiple levels of analysis around areas such as partner selections, social capital, and achievement (Borgatti & Ofem, 2015, pg. 20) as well as cognitive social analysis to understand the perceptions of the patterns of interactions within the network (Lima, 2015, pg. 245). Whilst there are many studies which examine links between organisations and community networks, it is the studies which examine the networks that surround and emanate from individuals which have resonance with this study (see Rice & Yoshioka-Maxwell, 2015).

My study is using the egocentric form of social network analysis, known as an ego-net (see figure (1) as an example), which means that participants are at the centre of their own social network and the network is viewed through the ego’s specific set of connections (Lima, 2015, pg. 243).

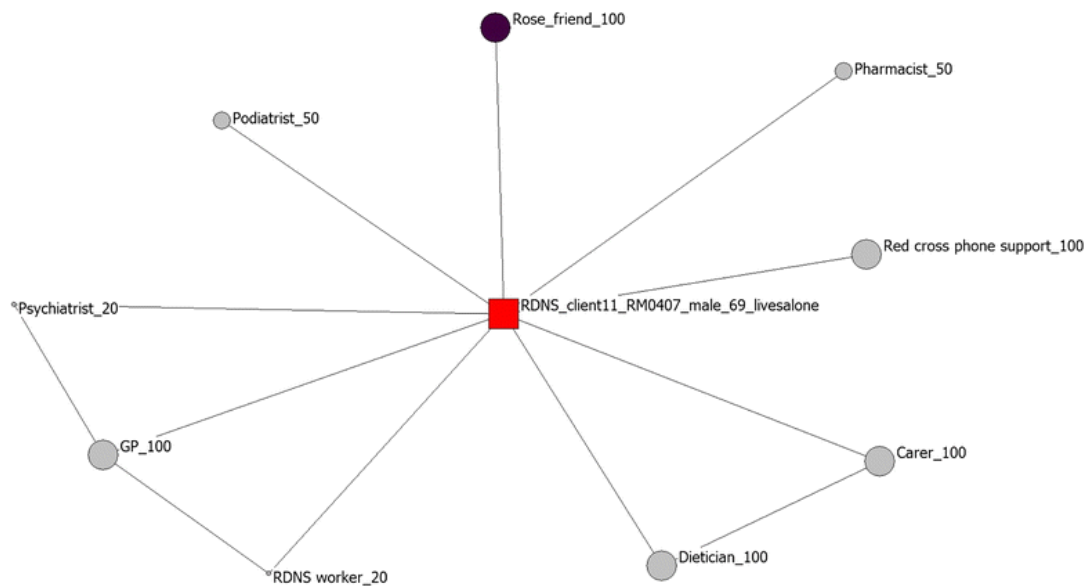


Figure (1): Simple Ego-Centric Network Map (extracted from Crotty et al., 2015)

In social network methodology a network is made up of ‘nodes’ and ‘ties’. A ‘node’ could be considered as the focal point on the network map and could be, for example, an individual, specific groups, institutions, or organisations (Crossley et al., 2015, pg. 5). Within this methodology a community can be defined as ‘groups of nodes within which the connections (or ties) are denser than between them’ (Chen, Nguyen & Szymanski, 2013, pg. 122). This resonates with the elements of community, such as connectedness, trust, and shared values and goals summarised by Rovai (2002) in 2.2.2.

In ego-net structure, the central node is referred to as the ego and nodes which represent other individual members of the network are often referred to as actors or alters (Borgatti & Ofem, 2015, pg. 19). In social network analysis an ego-net can contain two types of relationship: ego-alter and alter-alter connections and these would be referred to as a *dyad* (Crossley et al., 2015, pg. 14). The ‘tie’ is the connection or relationship across the dyad or between the nodes that are the focus of the network

study, and these may be singular or complex, for example, friendships, conflicts, information sharing, or financial exchanges (Crossley et al., 2015, pg.21). Marin (2004, pg. 298) suggests people will select those they feel the closest to. They often fall into distinct categories such as homophily, where there is similarity between the dyad such as gender or level of schooling, or proximity where the members of the network are connected through location either geographically, or within a building, or workplace (Borgatti & Ofem, 2015, pg. 22). When considering why members of the network have chosen to connect with others, the factors can be broad and provide an indication of the level of strength between them (Coburn, Choi & Mata, 2015, pg. 34). For example, a perceived level of expertise will be weaker in network strength when compared with friendship bonds (ibid.). In addition to the reason for the tie, the length of time the tie across the dyad has been in existence also has significant impact on the level of influence between the network members (Wang & Wellman, 2010, pg. 1163). In the construction of the social network and its analysis, the perceived tie would usually require the perspectives of all members of the network to be taken (Wellman, 1988, pg. 26). This is to avoid inaccuracies and increase the validity in the network data (Burt, 1987, pg. 63) and I address this in the network boundaries of the study design which I discuss in more detail in 3.5.1.2.

Within networks, there are clusters where all the members of a network know each other and this can be considered a 'clique' (Erickson, 1988, pg. 106). However, merely knowing another member in a network does not necessarily indicate the strength of the ties across them. For the cluster of members to be considered as a collective there needs to be a commonality, or multiplexity, which binds them together, such as proximity or levels of schooling which were mentioned earlier. Another connection

between members of a 'clique' is that of attitude similarity where members who agree are both attracted to and gain reassurance from each other (Erickson, 1988, p. 105). This similarity in attitude between the members can provide the conditions for social connection, where the opposing dissimilarity could inhibit the generation of social ties (Borgatti & Ofem, 2015, p. 19). Recognising this distinction has implications in the analysis of my study as I explore the nature of the interactions of the participants with their network members. Erickson (1988, pg. 101) explains that the exchange of views and comparisons with others is an integral facet of social life and people gain reassurance from agreement and can feel uncomfortable if their attitudes do not mirror those of others who are contextually close. These ideas are discussed further in the next sections of this chapter in the context of cultural and social capital, social control, and agency.

Whilst the ideas around attitude similarity and social comparison were discussed here in the context of cliques as a form of binding a collective of members within a network together, spatial distance and the distribution across a network in terms of symmetry are also modes for comparison and transmission of attitudes (Lima, 2015, p. 256). Symmetric relations are where there is an equivalence between the dyad in terms of power, respect, or friendships, whereas in asymmetric relations there is an imbalance in this mutuality (Breiger, 1988, p. 95). This asymmetry could be seen in my study as the tie between the participant and the head teacher or the participant and a mentee. Therefore, understanding the nature of the structure and distribution across the participants' networks will be an integral part of the analysis in my study.

Having explored the literature around the structure of social networks, I will now return to considering networks from an educational perspective and discuss the issues which surround professional learning communities. These are often considered to be drivers for collaborative relationships as well as change within and across schools (Hord, 2004, pg. 9) and therefore could play a significant part in the analysis of my study.

2.2.3 Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and Communities of Practice (CoP) provide a network structure for professional development, learning and socialisation for teachers (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005, pg. 116). These networks could be considered formal, for example, through school collaborations and partnerships focused around pre-agreed, collective activities (Adams, 2000, pg. 17). Equally, the networks could be informal, that is, have emerged from the socialisation of the teachers into a collective of practice focused on a shared norm or intention (McCormick, Fox, Carmichael & Proctor, 2010, pg. 8). Within the literature there is the distinction between the formality of the learning community and whether they are a PLC or a CoP (Blankenship & Ruona, 2007, pg. 1). The consensus appears to revolve around the PLCs having a formal structure focused on school improvement and membership is driven towards a leadership level whereas the CoP is presented as a 'grassroots' community which has evolved from a shared intention around the improvement of practice (ibid., pg. 7). Although there is the distinction between the origins of these communities, they both share the elements of community explored by Rovai (2002) in 2.2.2 of connectedness, interactivity, and shared values and goals.

Hord (2004, pg. 7) summarises the purpose and practices within these communities across five themes: 'supportive and shared leadership' that encourages teachers to be involved in the decision-making process; 'shared values and vision' focused on student learning; 'collective learning and application of learning' where there is engagement in development of staff knowledge; 'supportive conditions' to encourage the collegiality between teachers; and finally, 'shared practice' which involves a development of practice through discussion and feedback. Whilst these may appear to be simplistic summaries of the two communities, it does provide a framework which I can apply when considering this aspect of the participants' networks. I consider this distinction in analysis to be important, because as was highlighted by Palla et al. (2005) in 2.2.2 where they describe networks as 'overlapping communities' (pg. 814), it is likely the participants will have membership to a variety of communities within their networks.

Watson (2014, pg. 18) suggests that professional learning communities have become an almost permanent feature within schools, where their positive intentions around collaboration, inclusivity, and reflective practice are promoted heavily within the literature. Across the literature explored by Blankenship and Ruona (2007, pg. 4) there are multiple references to such terms as: 'shared vision and values'; 'collective learning'; 'supportive environments'; and 'shared practice'. However, this promotion is what Frankham (2006, pg. 661) was referring to in 2.2.1 when she called for a pause on this explosion of networks for the purpose of educational reform. It is the promotion of these terms around community which Frankham (2006, pg. 674) suggested gave an idealised view of the impact of the social network. This was also echoed by Watson (2018, pg. 27) who suggested that there was a dissonance across

the concept of professional learning and the embedded values for change. She suggested that the 'hegemonic appeal to 'community'' (ibid.) could result in a silencing of dissatisfaction rather than lead to a resolution of it. Moolenaar (2012, pg. 31) suggested the implications of these 'downsides' of teacher networks, such as, 'exclusion of outsiders' or 'downward levelling' which results from teachers accepting lower standards and the subsequent 'restrictions of individual freedoms', need further attention in the way they could constrain educational improvement. These are important considerations for my study as I explore the professional networks of the participants and try to understand the impacts these have on them.

In 2.2.1, Daly et al. (2010, pg. 360) suggested the importance of the role of teacher networks for reform and school improvement, which Watson (2014, pg. 27) referred to as the 'persuasive discourse' around the drive for 'school improvement'. However, Daly et al. (2010) highlight that there remains a scarcity in the knowledge of how this takes place, despite a large body of research since the 1990s on the impact of collaborative cultures in education (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015, pg. 85). Cross et al. (2001, pg. 119) suggest that one of the critical knowledge resources for any organisation, which includes schools, is that which the workers bring with them on a 'day to day' basis. However, they also suggest that understanding of the systematic ways this knowledge is embedded within social networks is limited. This is an important gap for my study to explore in understanding how knowledge flows through social networks and the impact this can have. In the next section I explore the theories of capital, which I am using to demonstrate the transactional value of knowledge and resources which flow through the networks, to understand the impacts this has for the participants.

2.3 Theories of Capital

This section of the review is structured through the development of capital theories. This is because capital has become a term commonly used as a form of representation which spans many areas of societal investment and exchange (Lin, 2011, pg. 4) Whilst the development in capital theories is increasing and encompassing an ever-wider field, I will consider in more detail the conceptual development and applications of those which I consider having significant importance within the context of this study, namely human, cultural, and social capitals. This concludes with considerations around Professional Capital, which Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, pg. 1) consider in the context of teachers' professional capacities.

2.3.1 Human Capital Theory

In the Marxist Theory of capital, capital is a broad term which is used to describe a commodity which can be exchanged or invested for returns. Where an individual is offering themselves as a commodity, then the individual, or more specifically what is being offered, is the capital. Thus, Human Capital, a term introduced by the economist Theodore Schultz in 1961, represents the skills that an individual can offer to a situation or society which have value and therefore are able to be used in exchange for other commodities. Human capital has been defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (1998) as '...the knowledge, skills, competences and other attributes embodied in individuals that are relevant to economic activity' (p.9). Therefore, human capital can be considered as qualifications, experience, and skills and the value of the capital will depend on the impact of the capital imparted by the individual. Human capital theory for Schultz (1961) and later

Becker (1964), was based on the investment of individuals with anticipated returns, for example, wages. Therefore, the value of this capital will be determined through a multitude of economic, societal, and political factors, which can be seen in the labour market in the variation of wages. However, the economic value attributed to the skills and other attributes is not of relevance necessarily in this study, yet it is important to recognise that the foundations on which capital is built upon is embedded in economic policy. This is because the designation of capital is one of transactions which enables an economic advantage and much of the literature discusses the economic privileges or inequalities.

Both Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964) argued that investment in human capital through education and training were the most important because of the anticipated gains of increased earnings. In contrast, Becker (1964, pg. 212) argued that the gains in human capital investment outside of earnings, such as 'advancement in knowledge', and increased social productivity through the increased leisure time, as described by Denison (1962, pg. 70), had even greater impacts on individuals, their families, and communities. This suggestion that human capital can be developed would indicate that investment would lead to greater rewards not only for the individual, but for the group, community, or society as a whole and means that human capital may be in the ownership of the individual, however its impact can be for the collective.

For Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, pg. 89) human capital reflects talent, however, they suggest that human capital is developed most successfully when groups or teams or communities come together. Therefore, I would suggest that this is more aligned to knowledge than talent and could reflect a resource that would flow through

interactions. However, the discussion on the understanding of human capital has continued to apply to the cognitive and physical competencies of an individual only. Yet these are not the only factors for success and growth (Brooks & Nafukho, 2005, pg. 122); the role of the emotional attributes an individual possesses also would also be a factor in their successes both professionally and privately. Therefore, the role of non-cognitive intelligence, described as emotional intelligence, could also be considered within the OECD's broad description of human capital (1998, pg. 9). Emotional intelligence, a term denoted by Salovey and Mayer (1990) to mean '...a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own feelings and emotions.....and to use this information to guide's one's thinking and action' (pg. 188). Therefore, when considering human capital theory, it is not only the qualification and experience which has relevance, but also the ability to connect with the group (Coleman, 1998, pg. 101).

When human capital was introduced in the 1960s it was from an economic position and focused on growth. As already highlighted, the economics and economic policy of capital theories are not the focus of my study. This study's aim is to explore the role of relationships and networks through the lenses of capital, agency, and resilience. Therefore, it is this collective aspect of human capital that is of importance in my study; through the interactions between individuals there is an acceleration in learning (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, pg. 89). This collective human capital is classed as social capital (*ibid.*). Before I explore this area of capital theory, I will postulate that whereas human capital is the possessing of cognitive, emotional and physical skills, experiences, and knowledge, another form of capital, known as cultural capital, plays

a significant role in the bridging across human and social capitals. Therefore, I will explore cultural capital, as introduced by Bourdieu (1986), in the next section.

2.3.2 Cultural Capital Theory

Bourdieu used the term cultural capital in his seminal work *The Forms of Capital* (1986, pg. 243) to represent the symbolic currency used to illustrate the exchange between individuals from a societal perspective. That is, it connects individuals together through a shared understanding from a cultural perspective (Lin, 2008, pg. 61). Bourdieu (1986) described cultural capital as consisting of three strands: the embodied: a person's cultural capital is a collective of their embodied 'dispositions'; the objectified: their knowledge, awareness, and possession of objectified 'cultural' artefacts; and the institutionalised: the extent of their education combined with the level of qualifications they have been awarded by institutions and, importantly, which institutions (pg. 243). Human capital as previously discussed in 2.3.1 embodies the attributes held by an individual, and for Bourdieu the cultural capital in human capital is represented by the embodied state: '...in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body...' (1986, p.242). These dispositions, Bourdieu suggested, could be accumulated through self-improvement, however access into education and socialisation within the social group, such as the family or wider class structures, also play significant factors in the cultivation of cultural capital (ibid.). Like Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964), Bourdieu (1986, pg. 243) suggested these forms of capital could have economic advantages through the conversion of this knowledge into positions of privilege within the labour market. Bourdieu's observations, however, related to the unequal achievements between children in different social classes in terms of the

variation in monetary successes (ibid.). Therefore, cultural capital was offering an explanation for the varying outcomes of individuals, despite the economic investment of universal schooling and education. Through the design of the study to capture an authentic voice of the participants, the intention is to gain a visibility of the participants' cultural status within their environments and explore how this influences their sense of belonging and agency.

Bourdieu (1986, pg. 244), in his presentation of cultural capital, makes little reference to human capital; only a mention of the role of Becker (1964) and his participation as one of the economists promoting the relationship between monetary growth from educational investment. Despite this, there are aspects of human capital in cultural capital, for example, within the embodied state and the 'dispositions' held by an individual, such as 'disinterestedness and daring' (Bourdieu, 1993, pg.63) as well as the institutionalised state through formal qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986, pg. 249). The embodiment of human capital argued by, for example, Schultz and Becker in the 1960s, is accessible, in theory, to all (Lin, 2011, pg. 10) however, Bourdieu's (1986) position represents this knowledge from the position of status and gives the individual a cultural advantage. From this perspective, cultural capital was highlighting the social inequality that human capital does not (Aziz, 2016, pg. 238). However, there can only be a social inequality if this inequality is reinforced by the social group or through institutions, and therefore perpetuates an exclusion on the grounds of cultural differences (Winkle-Wagner, 2010, pg. 1). Lamont and Lareau (1988, pg. 153) were critical of Bourdieu's description of cultural capital as they considered it to only focus on the reproduction of the inequality and not on the causes, nor the basis of the inequality. However, their definition of cultural capital '...as institutionalised, i.e.,

widely shared, high status cultural signals (attributes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviours, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion...' (p.156) appears to lay the responsibility of the reproduction directly with the institutions. Yet they have described Bourdieu's framework around cultural capital as being a class attribute or an 'informal academic standard'. Winkle-Wagner (2010, pg. 6) highlighted that Bourdieu considered an individual's social origin or family as a core element of cultural capital and I would suppose that even the knowledge of cultural capital and especially the critique of it, is an indicator of cultural capital itself. For example, the institutionalised element of cultural capital suggests there are particular 'knowledges', those which are regarded as being concentrated in the bourgeoisie and aristocracy classes, which leads to a dichotomy between what is taught by institutions and what institutions teach (Clegg, 2011, pg.98). This dichotomy leads to a social reproduction of knowledge (Bourdieu, 1993, pg. 123) where, unlike human capital the focus is on all the attributes of an individual considered of value. If they are translatable into positive outcomes, cultural capital encompasses the attributes of an individual which are highly regarded by society, which are then translatable into advantageous outcomes for the individual. The positionality of cultural capital by Bourdieu was a mechanism to explain the inequality of opportunity towards individuals. Whilst this is related to status and standing within society, I would suggest this can also apply to workplace settings and structures and one of the intentions in my study is to explore this aspect of capital through the experiences of the participants.

Whilst the discussions around cultural capital and its impacts on social, academic, and financial inequalities are wide and dominate heavily within sociology research (Kingston, 2001, pg. 88), in this study I am interested in what the cultural capitals are

within the network and how, in practice, these cultural 'norms' are structured and flow through the networks and professional relationships. Bourdieu called this *habitus* which is the repeated practice of a collective of actions and dispositions, built on a set of beliefs, which over time become normalised or habitual behaviours and thoughts (Bourdieu, 1980, pg. 53). *Habitus*, as described by Bourdieu (1980, pg. 55), is a product of the outcomes of previous experiences. These outcomes, Bourdieu says, '...tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time...' (1980, pg. 54) in a much more consistent form than adherence to rules and regulations. I take this to mean that gaining experiential knowledge through actions, an individual will internalise a set of practices which they consider to be beneficial and advantageous to them. Indeed, Field (2004, pg. 2) suggests that when an individual wants to make something happen, they will ignore formal procedures and 'set off to talk to someone they know'. Bourdieu suggests that this explains '...the continuity and regularity which objectivism sees in social practices without being able to account for it' (1980, pg. 54). Therefore, his notion of *habitus*, is 'socially constrained', in that, there is an 'interrelationship' between the social conditions and the practice of certain dispositions (1980, pg. 56). This has significance in my study as it suggests that the ways in which people behave is responsive to the social constraints placed upon them. Therefore, the extent to which people exert 'free will' (ibid., pg. 55) is dictated by the 'product (which) governs practice' (ibid.). Considering *habitus* from this perspective has resonance with the later discussions in 2.4 around agency and the ways on which individuals behave, or regulate their motivations (ibid.), to conform within their structural and social contexts. This discussion of cultural bridges 2.2 around inclusion

and action in social networks and its impact on social capital, which is the next conceptual development to be explored.

2.3.3 Social Capital Theory

Social capital, in contrast to human capital, which can be considered as an individual possession or endeavour, can only exist in the context of the interrelations between individuals, groups or organisations (Portes, 1998, pg. 3). Coleman considered social capital as 'resource for persons' (1988, pg. 98), and for Bourdieu (1986, pg. 250), these resources are only accessible through membership of a group where there is mutual recognition and acquaintance. This would suggest that if an individual possesses it, it is human capital and if they have access to it, then it is social capital. Therefore, an individual could lay claim to possessing social capital, however, it only exists through relations with others. For this reason, Coleman considered that social capital could only be defined by its function (1988, pg. 98): '...it is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics: they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure' (Coleman, 1990, p. 302). Portes (1998, pg. 5) suggests that such resources which may be labelled as social capital are as wide in possibility as, metaphorically, the range of options for a gift; however, these gifts are embedded within attributes such as trust, reciprocity, obligations, enforcement of group norms, or access to privileged information (ibid.). Thus, these 'gifts' are considered capitals, because investment, exchange or deficit of them impacts on the outcomes for individuals and they would be grouped as 'social capitals' because the source of them only exists due to the presence of others. Portes defines social capital as '...[an] ability to secure

benefits through membership in networks and other social structures' (1998, p. 6) and like both Coleman and Bourdieu, Portes considers social capital to have two fundamental aspects: the cause, or source, and the effect, in the form of benefits (2000, pg. 2). Equally, Lin considers the concept of social capital to be quite simple and straightforward: 'investment in social relations [the cause or source] with expected returns [the effect]' (2008, p. 6) and forms a two-step process: first, access of the social resources embedded in the network and second, translation into goal attainment (Lin, 1999a, pg. 32). This means that an individual would identify the other people within their network who would provide them with the resources to achieve their aim.

Lin suggests there to be four elements of social capital: 'information, influence, social credentials, and reinforcement' (Lin, 1999a, p. 31) and across these elements, there is a fungability, a mutual interchangeability without changes in value, which flow through the forms of social capital. Portes categorised these as: 'a) a source of social control, b) a source of family support, and c) a source of benefits through extrafamilial networks' (1998, p. 9). It is these forms that I will consider further in this section of the review as I build a framework to answer the second research question 'in what ways do middle leaders use their network contacts and what is the nature of the exchanges between them?'

In considering the three categories of Portes, I will approach these by combining the discussion of social capital as a source of family and extrafamilial benefits collectively as both embody the attributes of the use and functionality of the social network. Social capital as a form of social control will follow this discussion as it raises questions over the implications of the membership within social networks.

Access to Resources and Benefits

Networks will contain varying levels of social capital when viewed through the features across commonality of norms, levels of trust, commitment, attachments, and mutual obligations (Furstenberg, 2005, pg. 810). This variation has led to social capital becoming a metaphor for advantage as some people or groups of people, through their connections with others, may enjoy higher incomes, more prominence, lead on more important projects, or have access to greater facilities and services (Burt, 2008, pg. 31). However, Field (2004, pg. 74) suggests that 'everyone can use their connections as a way of advancing their interests, but some people's connections are more valuable than others.' Therefore, social capital, like cultural capital, has become understood to be a contextual extension of human capital in its explanation of inequalities between people who appear to have similar skills, intelligence, levels of articulation or attractiveness (Lin, 2011, pg. 20).

Within the literature there is a suggestion that different types of networks can provide different outcomes (Lin, 2008, pg. 12). In his influential paper, Granovetter (1973) discusses the impact of weaker ties within an individual's network. He suggests that where people hold strong bonds between them, this forms a dense network and where the bonds are weaker the networks are less dense (ibid., pg. 1370). This was a significant observation at the time of publication as social network analysis was in its infancy and sociologists, building on the work of Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964) on human capital, had only recently begun to pay attention to the benefits obtained through social connections (Lin, 2011, pg. 21). The significance of the observations made by Granovetter connect the structure of the network and the flow of

information and access to resources within them. In 2.2.2., Baker-Doyle (2001, pg. 17) suggests that closed networks, or the dense networks suggested by Granovetter (1973, pg. 1370), provide trust and commitment between the members. In comparison, the less dense networks suggested by Granovetter (ibid.) are represented as an open network (Baker-Doyle, 2001, pg. 17) and provide opportunities for 'innovation and adaptation', due to less constraint and greater diversity between the members (Lin, 1999b, pg. 483). Granovetter (1973, pg. 1378) suggested that the weak ties provided a bridge into other social circles and therefore, information would be able to move through social groups rather than the reproduction of knowledge which Lin (2008, pg. 8) describes as a feature in closed and dense networks. This distinction between the types of networks and the functions they serve have the potential to be important aspects of my analysis of the participants' data, especially in the various ways that they use their networks.

The distinctions made between the types of networks above are important as the extent of resources and benefits which individuals can access through them is variable (Lin, 2008, pg. 10). Like Lin (2008), Coleman (1988, pg. 108) suggests that closed groups create 'trustworthiness in a social structure'. Lin (2011, pg. 56) describes this as an 'assumed obligation for reciprocity or compensation' and this could be recognised across my participants through the sharing of resources, access to specialist equipment, or advice on improving instruction amongst a wealth of other resources (Bridwell-Mitchell & Cooc, 2016, pg. 8). The frequency of interactions, in the exchange of human capital, is a way of measuring social capital and the more populated a network and the more trust that is contained within the relationships between the people in those networks, the greater their social capital, both

individually and collectively (Small, 2009, pg. 113). Lin (2011, pg. 78) also suggests that social capital embedded within the networks can be used for 'status attainment' as is the case for seeking new opportunities and promotion. One of the advantages espoused within the literature around social capital is the access to privileged information and recommendations for higher status jobs and promotion (see Erickson, 2008). Therefore, access to information about new projects or potential availability of roles before public announcements would be considered advantageous. Erickson (2008, pg. 133) also suggests that recommendations requested by senior managers from their staff is a common form of recruitment. This is interesting because it was suggested by Borgatti and Ofem (2015) and Erickson (1998) in 2.2.2 that within close social connections there are similarities and shared norms and values. Therefore, by requesting recommendations it might be assumed that there is a reproduction within the workplace of similar people, who share similar values. Lin (2008, pg. 8) considered this to be a 'collective asset' and the maintenance of norms, trust and authority were important features in closed and dense networks. Coleman considered the social collectiveness as manifesting in a level of social control because it was grounded in a mutual understanding of solidarity and trust (1988, pg. 105). However, both Field (2004, pg. 88) and Portes (2000, pg. 10) argue for caution over postulating the advantages of 'civic spirit' (ibid.) within social capital. Field (2004, pg. 88) reminds us to keep in mind the 'dark side' of social capital and the possibility of exploitation through the memberships to social groups and inner circles. Therefore, having broadly explored social capital in the accessing of benefits and resources, I now take heed of Portes and Field and consider social capital from the perspective of control and exclusion.

Social Control and Exclusion

Thinking about social capital as a form of social control, individual behaviours can be driven and motivated by shared understandings of cultural norms to gain inclusion within social groups (Coleman, 1988, pg. 104). Social control can only take place within the boundaries of a membership with a social structure and therefore, to maintain the group solidarity, control over the membership and density of a group is required (Lin, 2011, pg. 20). This sense of community means that collectively it holds its social capital on a recognition of the structural benefits for all (Portes, 2000, pg. 3) and whilst the influence of the social control can provide benefits there can also be limitations for individuals (Browning, 2009, pg. 1558). The exclusion of outsiders to maintain the group's position through their collective understandings and to maintain strong connections between the members of the group was an underpinning for the concept of cultural capital discussed in 2.3.2. Whilst it is recognised that members of a group are considered more powerful for being within it (Coleman, 1988, pg. 104), there can be limitations of free-speech, new ideas, and social mobility (Baker & Faulkner, 2009, pg. 1532) which can be displayed in a fear of exclusion due to a lack of conformity (Granovetter, 1973, pg. 1373).

When considering the four elements of social capital introduced earlier by Lin (1999a), the individual gains social recognition and therefore, influence, as well as information, and protection, through reinforcement, from membership of the social group. However, within the same group this over-repeating, or repeated exposure, to the same information results in a reinforcement of the same knowledge and therefore, limited capacity for growth for both the individual and the community (Burt, 2004, pg.

390). This leads to a challenging paradox, in the context of schools, as they are considered complex adaptive workplaces which are also the sites for learning (Keshavarz, Nutbeam, Rowling & Khavarpour, 2010, pg. 1468). Therefore, for learning to take place it is necessary for there to be present a culture of openness to innovative ideas and concepts (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005, pg. 127), which is potentially not apparent within a closed group. This could mean that a school runs the risk of being excluded from important initiatives or adopting, uncritically, policies which have limited effectiveness (Bridwell-Mitchell & Cooc, 2016, pg. 15). These issues also pose a risk for individual teachers; membership of a group or a clique, as discussed in 2.2.2., has distinct advantages as discussed above in terms of access to information, and protection. However, motivation and psychological well-being are intrinsically tied with self-efficacy and agency in an individuals' professional capacity over choices (Ryan & Deci, 2001, pg. 156). These choices, for teachers, could be represented through their ability to choose their own professional goals and pedagogical strategies in teaching which reflect their own moral and educational beliefs and values (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, pg. 69). Therefore, their motivation and commitment in teaching could be influenced through the level of social control which is exerted through the social groups in which they exist if there is a need to compromise on these values to maintain their positions within school.

Field (2004, pg. 89) describes the influence of social control as 'social capital's dark side', in that, social capital can promote inequality because 'access to different types of networks is unequally distributed' (ibid., pg. 74). Erickson (1998, pg. 101) suggests that people can feel uncomfortable when faced with attitudes from others that do not mirror their own. When considering this from the position of those in leadership

positions, they may consider this to be a 'threat' to their authority (Fast, Burris & Bartel, 2014, pg. 1030) where 'employees have a sense that speaking out carries personal costs' (ibid.). Fast, Burris and Bartel (2014, pg. 1030) suggest that this occurs most frequently where managers have a low self-efficacy. However, in 2.4.2, Bandura (1989, pg. 1176) discusses the need for individuals to have a 'robust' sense of efficacy to achieve success. From the perspective of social control and exclusion, there is the risk that managers will find it 'undesirable' to seek out or take heed of employee voice (Fast, Burris and Bartel, 2014, pg. 1030) and prefer to cultivate relationships with those they consider agree with their own positions (ibid., pg. 1029). This would mean that some individuals, who reflect these positions, could become more influential and gain increased status, as suggested by Burt (2008) and Lin (2011) in the previous section 'Access to Resources and Benefits'. This contrasts with others, who are critical or hold alternative positions, could be isolated and excluded from the social group (Moolenaar, 2012, pg. 31). The unique position of the participants in my study, discussed in 1.4, means they are present within several different communities across schools and can be considered as being both leaders and followers. Therefore, within their narratives there is the potential for them to be considered from the position of instigator or victim of this aspect of social control and exclusion.

In 2.4, I explore in more detail the influence of relationships when considering an individual's sense of efficacy in the context of agency. In order to discuss this from a capital perspective, I first examine the concept of Professional Capital which was introduced by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) as a combined construct of human, social and decisional capitals.

2.3.4 Professional Capital

To conclude my exploration of capitals, I consider the position of Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) who combined human, social, and decisional capitals and defined this collectively as professional capital. They considered this combination of capital to be a way to 'articulate (the) importance of professional work, professional capacity, and professional effectiveness' (pg. 1). This focus on the professionalism, specifically of teachers, was to expand the conversation beyond human capital investments of students and consider in greater focus of investment in 'high quality teachers and teaching' (ibid., pg. 3). Whilst they considered human capital to be about 'talent' (ibid., pg. 89), they also suggested that 'groups, teams and communities are far more powerful than individuals when it comes to developing human capital' (ibid., pg. 3). In 2.3.1, I suggested that rather than considering human capital as talent, it was more aligned to knowledge and knowledge exchange because of this capacity to develop through social interactions.

In 2.3.3, the density of networks and frequency of interactions was posited to measure social capital and Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, pg. 4) theorise 'high social capital does generate increased human capital'. This is because people will gain in confidence and learning through 'having the right kind of people and the right kinds of interactions and relationships around them' (ibid.). This 'right kind' as suggested here includes, for example, feedback from 'critical friends' or moderated marking approaches to allow teachers to learn from each other, all of which constitute a 'collective capacity' between teachers (ibid., pg. 91). This collective capacity from the position of social capital, according to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, pg. 90) is due to the expansion of

‘...your network of influence and opportunity. And it develops resilience when you know there are people to go to who can give you advice and be your advocates’. This mirrors the notion of ‘teacher agency’ explored in 2.4.3. and the conceptualisation of resilience as a social and relational construct which is explored in greater detail in 2.6.2. In the context of my study, this aspect of social capital in the support of professionalism could be considered in the ways in which the participants draw on their networks to gain both reassurance and knowledge through their interactions.

Professional capital, though, according to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), is the combination of human and social forms of capital, along with another form, decisional capital. Decisional capital is the ability to make decisions in complex situations and is the essence of what it means to be a professional as it is the extent to which judgements can be made (*ibid.*, pg. 5). Experience, and the ability to develop practice, builds decisional capital which is demonstrated through a ‘collective responsibility, openness to feedback, and willing transparency’ (*ibid.*). Through these approaches, Hargreaves and Fullan suggest teachers are accepting of mistakes as this gives them the opportunity to learn and experience respect from their peer group (2012, pg. 5). They suggest that decisional capital is ‘mediated’ through the exchanges and interactions between colleagues (*ibid.*, pg. 96). However, they also suggest the impact of decisional capital is negated where teachers conform to practices due to a fear of management or ‘have their eye on their next performance-related pay packet’ (*ibid.*, pg. 94). The positiveness which Hargreaves and Fullan wax lyrical about here around the positive attributes of professional capital would suggest that the issues for teachers discussed in 1.2 and later in the context of burnout and stress in 2.5 could be resolved through supportive and affirming workplace relationships. As suggested in

2.3.3 'Social Control and Exclusion', this tends to be much more complex when dealing with human interactions and motivations. However, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, pg. 7) offer professional capital as a 'silver lining' to combat the 'fear, force, and financial short-sightedness' (ibid.) to achieve a high-quality teaching profession.

This exploration of Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) term 'professional capital', whose premise was built upon a need for teachers to be 'high committed...continuously developed...well networked...and able to make effective judgements using all their capabilities and experiences' (pg. 3) suggests that individuals accumulate professional capital through their experience and reflective practice over time (ibid., pg. 96). This would reflect a teachers' perception of their agency, which is explored as 'Teacher Agency' in 2.4.3, from individual and collective positions. However, Bandura presents this sense of agency from the perspective of 'self-efficacy', that is, agency is intentional actions which make things happen and efficacy is beyond just knowing what to do (Bandura, 2001, p. 2; Bandura, 1982, pg. 122). Both agency and self-efficacy are a series of beliefs in the capabilities for enacting change (Bandura, 2000, pg. 75). Wellman and Frank (2008) and Carrasco et al. (2008, pg. 563) describe agency in terms of self-organisation and capitalisation. Here, agency is focused at an individual level, however agency, summarised by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), is '...always a dialogical process by and through actors immersed in temporal passage engage with others within collectively organised contexts of action' (pg. 974) and as such they summarise their perspective on agency as 'relational all the way down' (ibid.). This suggests there is a circular argument, as highlighted in other areas of the literature, of the interplay between the individual and the relational and how one influences the other and the complexity which is embedded within it. Therefore, the discussion of the literature

will now move into agency and the theoretical and empirical positions of this human action.

2.4 Agency

This section of the literature is addressing the research question: “How do the interactions within networks influence the middle leaders’ sense of agency in their roles?” To address this question, I will discuss the arguments and research, both theoretical and empirical, around the area of agency. I begin with a presentation from the literature around ‘what is agency?’ into which develops a review of morphogenesis, as this has resonance with the literature on resilience and adaptation. I explore the considerations around teacher agency and conclude with a discussion of the impact of agency on mental health before I move into the next sections on burnout and stress and ultimately resilience.

2.4.1 *What is Agency?*

Agency as a concept, according to Emirbayer and Mische (1998), is one which has a ‘vagueness’ (pg. 962) due to the varying meanings, boundaries, and contexts associated with its definitions in social research; for example, meanings such as motivation, purpose, intention, choice, and freedoms (ibid., pg. 962). Bandura, rather than ascribing to a ‘vagueness’, states that ‘to be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one’s actions’ (2001, pg. 2) and this ability to execute control he considers to be the ‘essence of humanness’ (pg. 1). As an essence of humanness, it could be considered an innate trait; to have agency is a characteristic which is part of an individual’s nature. I would suggest that understanding the nature of what it is to

be agentic is to understand to what extent variation across individuals exists and whether we consider this to be a characteristic which one possesses or has the capacity for. Returning to Bandura, he suggests that agency encompasses a combination of self-regulation and belief systems which, in conjunction with personal endowments and structural contexts, enable personal influence to be exercised (Bandura, 2001, pg. 2). Therefore, rather than having distinct characteristics, agency is or is influenced by the interplay between dynamics of the individual within the environmental structure (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, pg. 963). Indeed, Archer (2010, pg. 273) heeds caution for agency to not be entirely directed at either the individual or the situational and I would consider this to indicate that people are able to exercise varying levels of agency across their personal and professional contexts.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) suggest that within the dynamics of agency there are also temporal considerations, in that 'human agency is...composed of variable and changing orientations within the flow of time.' (pg. 964). Therefore, agency could be considered as a snapshot, a specific moment in time, or over a period of time, such as an event, or a chapter or even the lifetime of an individual. This consideration of agency as a '...temporally embedded process of social engagement...' (ibid., pg. 963) Emirbayer and Mische explained to be structurally positioned and confined by the present, yet informed by experience, whilst driven by intentions for the future. This direction of thinking is reflected in Archer's (2010, pg. 273) positions on 'reflexivity' and 'morphogenesis' where she considers reflexivity as a way of using reflections of the past to inform action in the present. This position on reflexivity, where habitual behaviours are challenged through the need for alternative actions, are decided upon

through internal conversations (ibid., pg. 282). Bandura (2000, pg.75) suggests this decision-making process for alternative actions requires a positive perception of efficacy; a belief in ones' ability to affect a positive outcome drives not only the choice of action but also the level of commitment and perseverance. The mechanism for self-efficacy in the exercising of agency, for Bandura, is embedded within Social Cognitive Theory (1989). Social Cognitive Theory involves a 'system of triadic reciprocal causation' (ibid., pg. 1175) in which the combined influences of personal, behavioural, and environmental factors give rise to self-development, adaptation, and change.

In considering agency within Social Cognitive Theory, Bandura suggests that 'it requires a strong sense of efficacy to remain task oriented in the face of judgmental failures' (1989, pg. 1176) and that it is through an individual's belief system in their own efficacy they can exercise agency. Part of this, Bandura suggests, is their ability to predict events and create a means for 'exercising control' over the course of their daily lives (ibid.). This is significant as he suggests that 'those who judge themselves as inefficacious are more inclined to visualise failure scenarios that undermine performance by dwelling on how things will go wrong' (ibid.). This would suggest that an individual's experience of judgement could have a lasting impact in their view of their own self-efficacy and therefore their agency. This connects back to Archer (2010, pg. 273) and the influence of the situational and the structural on an individual's agentic behaviours and approaches, which I suggested to mean that individuals can exhibit and exercise varying levels of agency across the various aspects of their lives. Bandura (1989, pg. 1176) suggests that 'people must have a robust sense of efficacy to sustain the perseverant effort needed to succeed' and this appears to mirror the

literature later in 2.6.1 on resilience as a psychological construct and the notion of character. However, what is absent from Bandura's discussion are the relational influences, both positive and negative, on the development of an individual's self-belief system and in the context of resilience this is explored further in 2.6.2 where resilience is considered from a social and relational position. Returning to efficacy and having agency, it could be considered that to embody 'action for change' only applies where positive outcomes are the result and, as Bandura (2000, pg. 75) suggests, that it is an individual's perceived efficacy that will play a significant part in their approach to impediments and opportunities. This position of agency as a reflexive process, which evolves through experiences and is influenced by an individual's belief in their abilities, sits between the literature around professional capital (2.3.4), which is the combined capacity of an individual's knowledge, social connections, and ability to make decisions, and resilience, which is explored in 2.6.

However, outcomes to events can often be outside the control of individuals due to the complexity and chaotic nature of events and human interactions (Archer, 2010, pg. 273). Morphogenesis is the evolution and development through this complex activity from both an individual and structural perspective (ibid., pg. 274). Therefore, agency could be considered from a bidirectional position: one of enacting change whilst also responding to change, where these positions may occur independently or simultaneously. This would indicate that when considering action, it does not necessarily mean the intended outcome is the one which 'will' occur, but more a 'most likely' (Archer, 2017, pg. 11). From this perspective therefore, agency can be considered as the combined belief and motivational system in which someone can

enact change and is able to respond to change through a preparedness of it. I explore this further in the next discussion around morphogenesis versus morphostatic positions.

2.4.2 Morphogenesis versus Morphostasis

At the end of the previous section, I suggested that agency could be considered a combination of an individual's motivations and beliefs in their approach to change. From the discussion of Emirbayer and Mische (1998) and Archer (2010), these motivations and beliefs are temporally influenced by the structural contexts within which the individuals find themselves. Bandura (2001) suggests that within all individuals there is a sense of agency, that is to enact change, which I would suggest is to adapt and evolve. This can be, according to Archer (2010, pg. 275) explored through a morphogenetic approach, where there is consideration of the ways which '...structure and agency themselves *emerge, intertwine, and redefine* one another...' This approach is significant in my study, as one of the intentions (see section 1.5) is to explore the ways that the participants' networks and relationships influence their sense of control and how this influences their commitment and motivation to their roles.

Archer (2010, pg. 274) considers a morphogenetic-morphostatic divide, where each sit at opposite ends along a continuum. In Archer's (1998, pg. 375) basic morphogenetic sequence, she speaks of 'structural conditioning' and 'structural interactions'. In the context of agency, understanding the mechanisms through which the contextual influences (referred to as structural conditioning) and the relationships and actions within those contexts (referred to structural interactions) could provide a

valuable insight in the analysis in my study. For Archer, the outcomes of this sequence are divided across morphogenesis or 'structural elaboration' and morphostasis as 'structural reproduction' (2010, pg. 275) however she also notes that the word 'structural' can be replaced with 'cultural' as the processes for each are intertwined (Archer, 1998, pg. xxii). I consider this to mean that morphogenesis represents transformation through an innovation, a development, an evolution or change and therefore, morphostasis is simply a *status quo*, the situation or structure has not altered. Archer (2017, pg. 11) in her discussion of Morphogenesis and Human Flourishing, suggests that it is habits, or *habitus*, which I explored in 2.3.2 in the context of cultural capital, which will result in a morphostatic outcome. Through routine and structural strictures social order and reproduction will dominate over transformative processes. However, the opposite actions, that is, a move away from the *habitus* and social conditioning will '...generate increasing variety' (ibid., pg. 11) and give rise to the 'opportunity' for flourishing. These positions by Archer have significance with my discussion around PLCs (see 2.2.3), for example, where I discuss the dichotomy between their enactment for change and reform against the 'silencing' of dissonance and dissatisfaction with the *status quo* (Watson, 2018, pg. 27).

The 'silencing' of dissonance suggested by Watson (2018, pg. 27) is also resonant in the discussion in 2.3.3 and social control. Field (2004, pg. 88) described a 'darker side' of social capital which referred to the possibility of control within social groups. This would be reflective of the morphostatic outcomes which Archer was describing previously around the interactions between individuals and their structural contexts and the *status quo*. However, in her seminal work on Culture and Agency, Archer

(1988, pg. xxiii) suggests that 'culture and agency operate over different time periods.' This could have significance in my study, especially in the analysis, as this suggests that there could be morphogenetic transformations of the individuals, however the culture and structures would remain the same. For this reason, Archer (1995, pg. 87) considers the interconnection between structure and agency as a 'duality' where she suggests that the rule and resources which define structures are held outside of time and are 'instantiated', that is represented, by the agents within them. I take this to mean that both agency and structure can be considered separately whilst recognising that it is the agents who form the social structures. Therefore, I can within my analysis recognise that through the interpretations of the participants, they may view the structures and contexts differently.

This variation in view of the participants could be around the different perceptions of the values they place on the structures themselves. For example, in 2.3.3, I discuss the variations across distinct types of networks and the impact this has on social capitals. Lin (1999b, pg. 482) suggests that where there are few, strong connections within the network, which can be considered a closed network (Baker-Doyle, 2001, pg. 17), there is trust and commitment. However, where there is a wider network with weaker ties (Lin, 1999b, pg. 483) there is greater diversity and less constraint, which Baker-Doyle (2001, pg. 17) considers to be an open network and leads to 'innovation and adaptation'. The literature here around social networks and social capital connects with the literature from Archer (2010, pg. 274) and the morphogenetic-morphostatic continuum. Where there is structural and cultural reproduction, in the case of the morphostasis, the *status quo* is maintained. This provides stability through the

‘continued defence of pre-established *vested* interests’ (Archer, 2014, pg. 8) as suggested to exist in a closed network. I suggest that depending upon an individual’s position within the structure, this would influence whether they view the process as supportive or constricting. On the opposite end of the continuum, in the case of morphogenesis, there is a break away from the *habitus* that has been dominant in the past. The resulting change and transformation are, Archer (2014, pg. 8) suggests, the result of the ‘*objective* interests of agents who are beneficiaries of novel benefits that have no history, only the promise of a future’, which would reflect the perspective of an open network. This change in structure could be viewed to provide the opportunity for ‘flourishing’ yet could also be destabilising. It will be interesting to see the variations in perspectives across my participants through their experiences within their schools and their networks. With this in mind, I now move on to consider the various positions around teacher agency.

2.4.3 Teacher Agency

By exploring teacher agency, I am drawing on my discussions across 2.4.1 and 2.4.2 and considering teacher agency from the perspective of the motivations and beliefs of teachers in their approach to efficacy and change within the contexts of school structures and education policies. I do not consider the agency of teachers to be different to the agency of other professions, but rather it is the differences of the structural and cultural contexts which impacts on the agentic perspectives of individuals. It is the demands of these to be the factors which separate the agency of teachers compared with the agency of nurses, for example. Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2016, pg. 2) ask the question in their publication ‘Teacher Agency’ of

whether teachers are 'capable of being active agents of their own work or whether this capacity has been eroded as a result of structures and cultures that sought to restrain rather than enable teachers' professional agency.' In the context of teachers, which my study is focused on, Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2016, pg. 5) were concerned with treating agency as a '*phenomenon*' and to explore how 'teachers achieve agency in their everyday settings and what might help or hinder in this' (ibid.). Therefore, if we consider agency from the position of a combined belief and motivation system in which someone can enact change (see section 2.4.1), then consideration around teacher agency should be focused on the impact of the structures and cultures within which they work. The position from Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015, pg. 5) was 'encompassing' the ways that *all* teachers can exert control over their work, rather than focusing on 'those who lead' and are therefore considered to be able to influence change. However, in the context of my participants as middle leaders, I intend to explore how they consider themselves able to enact change and have influence within their schools whilst working within the dynamics, as discussed in 1.4, of being 'squeezed' between the senior leadership team and department colleagues.

Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2016, pg. 37) consider the role of teachers' beliefs to be significant when considering agency. The importance of beliefs is reflective of the positions of Bandura, Archer as well as Emirbayer and Mische in 2.4.1 when trying to understand what is agency? The role of beliefs in teacher agency, according to Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2016), is concerned with the ways that teachers approach situations and how they consider children and young people, the role of

education and the purposes of it (ibid., pg. 38). Through their empirical research, for example, they established that teachers felt a 'strong sense of professional responsibility towards their students' (ibid., pg. 45) and this was reflected in their commitment to their work. Woolfolk-Hoy (2008, pg. 497) also discussed the 'call to serve' as a prevalent motivation for teachers to enter and remain in the profession. However, she also suggested that the realities of teaching, for those with altruistic motivations, can be 'disheartening' due to the conflicts between 'serving and surviving' (ibid.). These conflicts, for Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2016, pg. 57), are the result of the 'orientation towards the here and now' rather than 'the wider purpose and meaning of schooling'. This means that where teachers' motivations are driven by 'wanting to make a difference' and to play a significant role in the outcomes of students' lives in the long term, they find themselves entangled within 'systems of accountability' (ibid.). These systems suggest that specific forms of action are preferred and valued over others. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011, pg. 1031) suggest that this can result in teachers becoming less comfortable where they feel their own values and beliefs are not 'congruent' with those of the schools in which they teach. They refer to this as 'contextual dissonance' (ibid.) which can result in teachers feeling a lack of belonging or not fitting in with their environment. These observations are significant because they emphasise the need for teachers to feel connected within their teaching environments and they need to have the opportunity to talk about their beliefs in a way that made them feel part of a team (ibid., pg. 1036).

Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2016, pg. 103) highlighted the school structure as being of particular importance in the ways in which teachers were able to feel they

could discuss education within their settings and have an influence on this. Their empirical evidence was pointing towards a collegiate atmosphere which created a 'collaborative culture' where the strong, informal relationships were influenced through the existence of reciprocity and symmetry (ibid.). The influence of the nature of the relationships was highlighted in 2.2.2 by Lima (2015) and (Breiger, 1988) around the transmission of attitudes, where Erickson (1998) suggested that people can gain reassurance when they are in the company of others who share the same views. This would appear to be moving the consideration of teacher agency as being collective rather than as 'teacher autonomy' (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2016, pg. 152). This is because, as part of the conclusions they draw from their research, 'teacher agency depends upon the relational resources afforded by networks and social connections' (ibid.) and these relationships provide a supporting structure to stimulate discussion around 'alternative cultural ideas which promotes new professional learning' (ibid.). These conclusions have important considerations for my study as I explore the professional networks and relationships with my participants and capture the ways in which information flows between them.

In 2.3.4 Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) emphasised the importance of supportive and trusting relationships in the building of professional capital for teachers. This is also evident here in the discussion around teacher agency and the importance of having a feeling of belonging to allow for a sense of job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011, pg. 1036). Therefore, I will explore the considerations around agency where individuals do not feel a sense of belonging, which mirrors the impact of social exclusion discussed in 2.3.3, and the impact this has to mental health.

2.4.4 Agency and Mental Health

When considering agency from the perspective of control, in 2.4.1 I discussed how an individual will feel that they have agency when they have choice in the decisions around and within their lives. The feeling of being trapped within a situation where the control over the choices and the possible outcomes, as suggested by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011, pg. 1030), there is a feeling that the person is experiencing a limitation on their agency. Tak, Brunwasser, Litchwarck-Ashchoff & Engels (2017, pg. 744) consider this to have negative consequences with respect to mental health as it diminishes an individual's belief in their abilities. The negative consequences, which Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011, pg. 1039) concluded from their empirical research, were centred around an 'emotional exhaustion' which could be due to the lack of belonging which some teachers had felt. The outcome of this was that an increased motivation for teachers to leave the profession, which I highlighted in 1.2 was becoming a critical factor due to the decline in teacher numbers compared with the rise in that of pupils.

At the core of Bandura's agentic perspective is an individual's capacity for development, adaptation and renewal (2001, pg. 2). Resilience is often depicted as an outcome of adaptability (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014, pg. 216), however, I would argue that adaptability is an outcome of being resilient, which therefore provides the necessary capital to feed agency. Therefore, taking into consideration the issues raised by Tak et al. (2017) and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) above, I will now explore the literature in the areas of Burnout and Stress and use this as a foundation in the discussion on resilience.

2.5 Burnout and Stress

Burnout can be identified as a syndrome that results from work related stress caused through emotional anxiety and fatigue, a sense of limited efficiency, minimal autonomy, helplessness, and loss of control. Its effects can be categorised into three areas, that of 'emotional exhaustion', 'depersonalisation' and 'reduced personal accomplishment' (Maslach, 2003, pg. 12). Teaching is recognised as a profession which requires emotional labour and as such teachers are susceptible to burnout (Howard and Johnson, 2004, pg. 399). Since burnout is the result of work-related stress, understanding what this is or how it might arise is important. Work-related stress occurs where the combination of work demands exceed an individual's capacity or ability to manage (Health and Safety Executive, 2017) and has significant costs not only to health and well-being but also to economic costs for workplaces and individuals (Howard & Johnson, 2004, pg. 401).

Empirical research within schools has highlighted risk factors for teacher stress, such as leadership style and school culture (Fernet, Guay, Senecal & Austin, 2012), student behaviour (Chang, 2013), rate of reform (Stauffer & Mason, 2013), relationships (Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt & Vanroelen, 2014), accountability (Berryhill, Linney & Fromewick, 2009), self-efficacy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010), administration and workload (Helou, Nabhani & Bahous, 2016). However, these factors were highlighted in much earlier work in the literature by Kyriacou (2001, pg. 29) who summarised the work of many international studies and identified that the challenges faced by teachers in their everyday lives could be collectively grouped into ten areas of potential stress: '...teaching pupils who lack motivation, maintaining discipline, time

pressures and workload, coping with change, being evaluated by others, dealing with colleagues, self-esteem and status, administration and management, role conflict and ambiguity and poor working conditions...' (ibid.). All these studies would indicate that teacher stress has not changed over the previous two decades, however, they do raise awareness of exposure to prolonged stress which leads to burnout and the possible psychological, social, and economic damage they can have.

Whilst workload is attributed as the most influential factor currently for teacher attrition (House of Commons, 2017), the research highlighted above suggests that there are many sources of stress within the workplace. Therefore, it could be considered too simplistic to suggest that workload is the only focus for intervention in the reduction of teacher attrition (Worth, Bamford & Durbin, 2015, pg. 15). To deal with challenging circumstances, coping strategies are common interventions which allow individuals to successfully manage the stresses they face (Beltman, Mansfield & Price, 2011, pg. 196). However, they also suggest that employers recognise their responsibilities for improving the conditions of teachers over the longevity of their careers (ibid.). This temporal view of coping, that is management over the longer term rather than the quick fix intervention, is important in effectively managing the potential sources of stress on teachers in such a way that they remain committed, motivated, and successful in their work (Meister & Ahrens, 2011, pg. 777). This equilibrium between the risk (sources of stress) and protective (coping strategies) factors and potential burnout has been described by Beltman, Mansfield and Price (2011, pg. 188) as *resilience*. However, resilience is a multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary and multi-level concept (Shaw, McClean, Swartout & Querna, 2016, pg. 35) and as

such there are many varying constructs of resilience, and these will be explored further in the next section of this review.

2.6 Resilience

Resilience was introduced in 2.5 as an equilibrium or dynamic between the risk and protective factors, influencing stress and potential burnout and has been the subject of much theoretical and empirical research in education (Beltman, Mansfield & Price, 2011; Brunetti, 2006; Gu & Day, 2007; Mansfield, Beltman, Broadley & Weatherby-Fell, 2016; Meister & Ahrens, 2011). Within this literature, the conceptualisation of resilience is often categorised from a psychological, social and relational, or systems perspective (Adger, 2000; Shaw et al., 2016; Windle, 2011) and these will be considered here in the context of my study.

2.6.1 Resilience as a psychological construct

The psychological perspective of resilience focuses on the individual and their own personal attributes. Much of the early work on resilience stems from the work on children and young people in vulnerable or disadvantaged backgrounds, who have managed to overcome the challenges they faced and lead successful adult lives (Benard, 2004; Davis, 2007). Therefore, it is not surprising that the research, especially the early work on resilience, often leads to an understanding of resilience as an ‘against all odds’ or ‘thriving in the face adversity’ mind-set where many individuals who are labelled as resilient are hailed as ‘superheroes’ or ‘superhuman’. However, Gu and Day (2013), from their work on the VITAE project, define resilience as a ‘...capacity to maintain equilibrium and a sense of commitment and agency in the

everyday worlds in which teachers teach' (pg. 26). This definition makes it more akin to maintaining an everyday balance with an everyday commitment to the everyday challenges rather than heroic, superhuman capacities. Whilst some of the theoretical and empirical research on the nature of resilience will use a literal defining quality, such as, an ability to cope with significant adversity or trauma (Luthar & Brown, 2007, pg. 931), Brunetti (2006) describes resilience as an ability to 'stay the course' (pg. 813).

One of the criticisms of the resilience literature from this psychological perspective has been this presence of heroism. Margolis, Hodge & Alexandrou (2014, pg. 392) argue that promotion of resilience as a personal attribute of teachers has damaging effects on teacher well-being. Rutter (2012, pg. 336) was also critical of the use of resilience in the 'happiness agenda' as he suggests this can downgrade the stress and adversity which individuals have overcome. Whilst Day & Gu (2014a, pg. 15), are very clear to emphasise that resilience is about everyday commitment over the career span of teachers, the critique by Margolis, Hodge and Alexandrou (2014, pg. 395) is the suggestion that the aim of resilience is the resilience of the workplace, at the expense of the individual, and that resilience could become a metaphorical stick used in the drive for increased productivity. In a similar vein, the empirical work of Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly (2007) on 'grit, defined as 'perseverance and passion toward long term goals'' (p. 1087), has seen challenge, like that of Margolis, Hodge and Alexandrou (2014) on resilience, of the wider implications in the promotion of 'grit' in Education. (Almeida, 2016; Gonzales, 2016). Almeida argues for a qualitative review of the notion of grit and Gonzales is arguing for critical qualitative inquiry to understand its interplay with motivation and to understand the experiences of students and educators within the interventions in the 'teaching' of grit.

What is interesting about these critiques of resilience and grit, in terms of the assumptions made, is that in all cases they challenge the understanding and notion of 'character'. In the field of psychology, where there is a wide base of literature on the psychological constructs of resilience, there is reference to 'caution' when referring to resilience as a stable personality trait or characteristic (Luther, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000, pg. 546). From a psychological perspective, resilience is not an innate or fixed trait but rather a dynamic which can be influenced by a variety of factors (Rutter, 2006, pg. 2). Indeed, Shaw et al. (2016, pg. 35) argue that resilience is often directed at an individual-level rather than a systems-level responsibility. Whilst the concept of the equilibrium between the risk and protective factors is important it is also as important to recognise that resilience cannot be considered from a static position; the concept of resilience is not just one of maintenance or bounce-back, but is one of development, a capacity for renewal and growth (Allison, 2001, pg. 80).

However, often the underlying descriptors for resilient qualities which are focused on dispositions are not completely dissimilar to the coping strategies for stress, such as adapting to change, possessing a cheerful disposition or investment in personal relationships (Mansfield et al., 2016, pg. 81). In their review of teacher resilience Beltman, Mansfield, and Price (2011, pg. 191) identified a number of personal resources which feed into resilience and these include motivation, self-efficacy, and flexibility, amongst those that were highlighted. Therefore, from a psychological perspective, rather than resilience being a trait, it is the attributes of an individual which have influence over their ability to be resilient. Yet, resilience is a dynamic with an inter-play between factors which have influence (Rutter, 2006, pg. 2). Whilst resilience has been considered here from a psychological perspective, individuals do

not achieve success on their own and the social context plays a significant role (Davis, 2007, pg. 4) and therefore consideration is needed around the literature on resilience as a social construct as this has a significant contribution to my study.

2.6.2 Resilience as a social and relational construct

From a sociocultural perspective, the concept of resilience is indeed very multi-dimensional, in that, what affects an individual's capacity to be resilient is very much determined by the nature of the context within which they live and work (Dagdeviren, Donoghue & Promberger, 2016, pg. 2). Self-reliance (which could be considered an indicator of psychological traits of resilience) may result in a resistance to asking for help and therefore miss the opportunity of forming supportive connections (Driscoll, 2013, pg. 143). For Raider-Roth, Stieha and Hensley (2012, pg. 495) the opposite of resilience is resistance and in the context of teachers, resistance might be observed where a teacher refuses to work within a particular policy, follow a specific assessment method, or to deliver a particular aspect of a curriculum, for example. In these cases, the teacher has decided to follow a resistive course of action. This resistance was described by Raider-Roth, Stieha and Hensley (2012) in their qualitative study of the effects of disconnection by individuals and the subsequent 'rupture' (pg. 501) from within the social structure. The rupture experienced by the participants was 'repaired' (ibid.) through encouragement and inclusion within the group. Whilst the social structure has significant impact on both the incidents of rupture and repair reported by the participants, this rupture may have been the result of a protective 'cannot' resistance rather than a defiant 'will not'.

Resistance could also be the result of a moral dilemma where an individual finds themselves in conflict of their own beliefs. In 2.4.3, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011, pg. 1031) suggest teachers can feel a 'contextual dissonance' if their values do not align with those of the school and they struggle to feel a sense of belonging. This rupture through resistance and the risk to mental health through social exclusion or isolation is well documented (see Kashyap, 2014). Within the health and psychology disciplines there is a wealth of research which investigates the effects of support groups, the collective nature of the social group, for people who are experiencing adverse or challenging situations such as family breakdown, bereavement or significant illness (Samuels & Pryce, 2008; Reger & Ehrenberg, 2012; Seebom, 2013). In the context of my study of teachers, this would be experienced through isolation from colleagues and feeling a lack of control, that is agency, within the workplace and the literature around this was explored in 2.4. This means the ethos and culture of the environment play a significant role in the resilience of the individuals (Day & Gu, 2010, pg. 172). These social factors influencing resilience are important factors in my study as it is investigating the impact of the teacher's relationships on their resilience in the workplace. The protective factors which promote a positive workplace culture emphasise things such as: teacher autonomy (Howard & Johnson, 2004, pg. 401); recognising individuals feeling helpless or having lack of control over the factors in their working lives (Fernet et al., 2012, pg. 516); leadership which maximises collaboration and not conflict with colleagues (Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt & Vanroelen, 2014, pg. 101); and can manage the rate of reform or change within the organisation (Day, 2008, pg.258). Whereas in the psychological perspective of

resilience the focus was on the attributes of the individual, now it is the attributes of the social context which are being considered.

Day and Gu (2010) argue that school leaders, who are the 'creators and guardians' (pg. 140) of the workplace play a considerable part in the resilience of its workforce. The ethos and culture nurture the continued commitment of teachers and although Margolis and Alexandrou (2014) were critical of the use of resilience by the workplace, they agree with Day and Gu (2014b), in that, environments are built on relationships, and it is these relationships which are central to the experiences of the workforce. When considering the workplace there is, however, a circular argument between the importance in the workplace culture in the support of the workforce it creates, or the workforce as the creator of the culture. Workplaces, in this case schools, can be considered as 'complex adaptive systems' due the very nature of this dynamic which takes place within them (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, pg. 28). It is difficult to separate out the concept of resilience from a linear or positivist perspective when there are many complex interactions at play (Morrison, 2008, pg. 25). However, it is the very nature of these interactions which creates environments that are both dynamic and have capacity for connection, adaptation, and growth (ibid.) and within the literature these appear to be important facets of resilience as a construct across all perspectives.

Central to the argument of resilience as a social construct is the nature of relationships and within the literature this takes the form of relational resilience (Jordan, 2004, pg. 28). The notion of relational resilience means the nurturing of relationships to allow for the nurturing of resilience (Day & Gu, 2014a, pg. 10). Putting this into the context

of my study it emphasises the importance of relationships within the workplace. Gu (2014, pg. 513) suggests there are three groups of relationships for teachers; these are with other teachers, the principal (or Head Teacher as is commonly used in England), and with students, which play a significant role in their sense of 'professionalism, resilience and commitment' (ibid.). Jordan (2004, pg. 32) also emphasises the power of connection; to ignore the importance of relationships, ignores the recognition of building capacity within oneself through the support of others by using relationships to 'ride the storm' when faced with adverse or difficult circumstances. Jordan is implying connection provides a greater capacity for growth and transformation (ibid.). This echoes the elements of morphogenesis (Archer, 2017) (2.4.2) and within complexity theory (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014) (2.6.3). My study intends to explore the significance of relational resilience in more detail by understanding how teachers' value and use their relationships in their networks.

As has been discussed by Day and Gu (2014a, pg. 9), relationships lie in the roots of resilience, that is, the interactions between individuals and collective groups have influence. Therefore, the motivation between the two are crucial to understand, especially in terms of leadership and relationships within organisations. Beltman, Mansfield and Price (2011, pg. 196) suggest that understanding how teachers can 'harness' support through their networks is a key area for consideration. Hauser, Golden, and Allen's (2006, pg. 210) narrative study of resilience draws from the stories of their participants to understand the individual and their surroundings. The landscape of an individual teacher's network and relationships and the way that these influence the teacher's own perceptions of their reality, whilst complex, is significant to the concept of resilience. These connections are also considered important because

‘social bonds...and social resources...function as reserves that can be drawn on later to improve the odds of successful coping and survival’ (Fredrickson, 2004, pg. 1367). It is important to note the use of the word ‘reserve’ here, as Day and Hong furthered this notion of reserve in describing resilience as a ‘latent capacity’ (Day & Hong, 2016, pg. 117). The model of resilience as a latent capacity is a useful one to illustrate the dynamic nature of resilience and in the next section this model and resilience from a systems perspective are considered further through the lens of relational resilience.

2.6.3 Resilience from a systems perspective

When considering resilience from a systems perspective, the considerations relate to the stability of the system or the ability to maintain equilibrium and Day & Hong (2016, pg. 117) defined resilience as a ‘latent capacity’. A latent capacity is a ‘reserve tank’, a resource which will allow a system to maintain equilibrium despite adverse conditions. With any system, there is an input and an output. When one or both are put under strain, the reserve tank uses the resource to maintain equilibrium whilst the strain continues. Once the resource is depleted, then the system will either no longer be able to maintain the equilibrium or will need to adjust either the input or output or cease to function effectively. In this metaphorical model, in the context of education, the system could be an individual teacher, a department, a school or even the entire educational system. One of the limitations of this metaphorical model is that it is about maintenance and not growth. Whilst Jordan (2004, pg. 32) uses ‘transformation’ as a description of growth and ‘resilience’ as a return to the previous state, literally bounce-back, Allison (2011, pg. 80) uses resilience to argue for a ‘bounce forward’. In 2.4.2, Archer (2010, pg. 274) discusses the morphogenetic-morphostatic continuum,

where morphogenesis is 'elaboration' or transformation and morphostasis is 'reproduction' or a return to the status quo. These perspectives would reflect the differing perceptions between Jordan (2004) and Allison (2011) around resilience and whether resilience should be considered transformational or about maintenance. Returning to Gu and Day (2013, pg. 26) their position on resilience is related to maintaining an everyday balance, which is echoed by Rutter (2012, pg. 332) where he suggests more focus should be placed on the quiet satisfaction of a 'job well done'.

From a complexity perspective, a system to survive needs to adapt to the changing circumstances of the context which it is in (Bryne & Callaghan, 2014, pg. 99). In 2.4.4, I suggested that resilience as an outcome of adaptability as suggested by Bryne and Callaghan (ibid., pg. 216), should be considered from the perspective of resilience *enabling* adaptation. Returning to 'latent capacity' metaphor from Day and Hong (2016, pg. 117), if resilience can be considered the reserve tank which enables an equilibrium across the input and output demands of a system, then it would follow that any adaptation would occur across these demands. The reason this is significant is because it influences how managing workplace demands are perceived. Bryne and Callaghan (2016, pg. 100) direct us towards considering adaptative capacity of systems through their ability to be flexible, however they also warn that an over stretching will cause systems to reach their elastic limits (ibid., pg. 1010). The result of this would be a break or a snap. Returning to the 'latent capacity' metaphor for resilience, where the reserve tank has been depleted, then burnout occurs due to workplace stress from the strain placed on the individual and this could be considered the metaphorical snap.

Viewing this metaphorical model through the lens of relational resilience, means the use of relationships as a resource to allow the equilibrium to be maintained. Indeed, what is important in the context of my study is understanding the complex arguments around resilience, the equilibrium, and the importance of relationships as a protective factor whilst recognising that relationships could also be a risk factor. Therefore, recognising resilience through the 'latent capacity' metaphorical model has significant importance for my study because these strategies or dispositions (described as the protective factors) can be seen as resources which can be used or called upon when needed.

2.7 My Accumulative Model from the Literature

From the literature explored in this chapter, I consider the relationships between the social networks, capital, agency, and resilience to be represented in the visual model in figure (2) below:

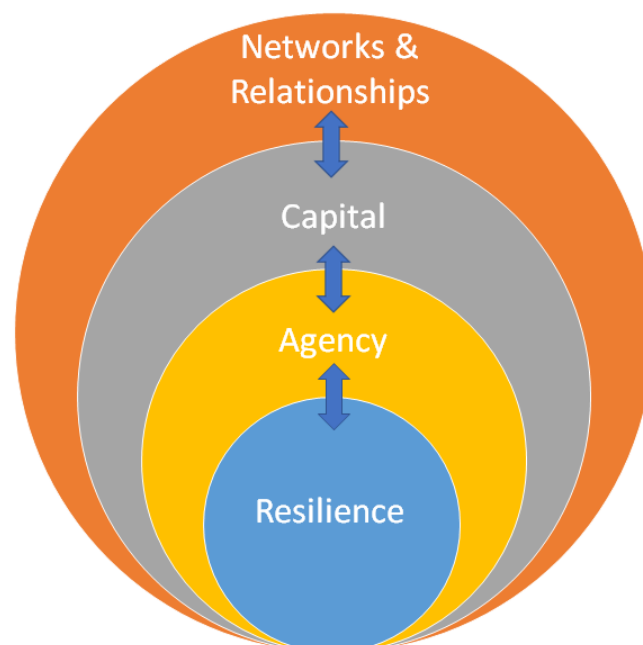


Figure (2): My Accumulative Model from the Literature

Figure (2) represents the way in which each layer influences and interacts with the next and this follows the order of the research questions, discussed in 1.6. The outer boundary is represented by the networks and relationships which surrounds each person, and this interacts bi-directionally with their metaphorical capitals. The capitals represent the transactional nature of their exchanges of their knowledges, their cultural positions, their access to benefits and resources through social memberships, and the way this influences their professional capacities and judgements. These capitals influence the way a person considers themselves in terms of their efficacy and ability to control their environments through the way they can access the resources they need. The combination of their sense of efficacy and having advocates who will provide emotional and professional support when required enables their sense of resilience to be able to maintain a commitment in their lives, despite challenges and setbacks.

Having explored the literature and established a framework for analysis in my study, I now present my methodological and ethical positions in my study and their influence on the methods and approaches to analysis I have selected.

3. Chapter 3 Methodology, Ethics, and Research Design

3.1 Introduction

This thesis is adopting a broadly interpretivist approach and the chapter begins with an explanation of the rationale for considering this study's philosophical and theoretical decisions in relation to the lived experiences in schools and subjective influences of the participants and myself as a practitioner-researcher. Schools can be regarded as 'complex adaptive systems' (Keshavarz, Nutbeam, Rowling & Khavarpour, 2010, pg. 1468) and throughout the thesis, it is recognised that I, as researcher, and the participants, combined with the contextual environment of a school, are all situated within complex, potentially volatile, and often political systems (Robson & McCartan, 2016, pg. 4). Therefore, there is an acknowledgement early in this chapter, drawing from Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, pg. 28), of the influence of the complexity paradigm which espouses non-linear and holistic approaches in research to break the simple cause-and-effect models and simple determinism view of the world. Whilst my study is not exploring the outcomes of an intervention, it is exploring the lived experiences of middle leaders in schools. Therefore, understanding the context and structures within school across a variety of complex factors could have significance from the point of view of the methodology of the study.

The approach taken throughout this thesis is one of interpretivism which is intertwined with social constructionism and the participatory ideology of critical subjectivity. I take 'critical subjectivity' as meaning to be aware of our reality in relation to the interplay of influences around us (Reason, 1994, pg. 334). The chapter

introduces the challenges faced through this approach on what could be seen as the ontological and epistemological divide, and draws on Bhaskar (1998, pg. 29), amongst others, in identifying and rationalising this dichotomy. That is to say, 'what is to be known' ontologically is constructed by the participants' perspectives within the research process and 'what is known' epistemologically becomes my interpretations made in the analysis. Throughout this study, the ontology is one that individuals, who could be considered actors from a social network analysis or agents from an agency perspective, are active in their reflexivity and adaptation. This means there is a dynamism, epistemologically speaking, in their justified beliefs and opinions (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2010, pg. 13). I refer to Clandinin & Rosiek (2007, pg. 38-43) and others when considering this dynamism, in the research context, through the way the participants are experiencing their reflections of experience.

The chapter develops and focuses this argument further through the introduction and discussion of the subjective position that is at the heart of the methodology. I am referring here to the multiplicity of internal discussions, which is active reflexivity, around the justified beliefs and understood truths that are engrained in experiences. These would not only be the experiences of the participants but also across myself as practitioner-researcher, and the combined experience during the research process. I discuss in further detail here the positioning of critical subjectivity, from both a participatory perspective and that of individual reflexivity. Drawing on Reason (1994; 1999) and Boland (2007), along with others, the chapter identifies the evolution between the reflexivity that is needed in qualitative research and that of critical subjectivity, which I consider to be active reflexivity with emancipatory purpose.

The chapter continues into the considerations around the ethical process and positions which underpin the data collection. Using Gray (2014, pg. 68) in conjunction with the BERA guidelines for conducting research (2018, pg. 6-25), I adopt a framework which sets out the moral guiding principles when considering the duty of care to the participants. The ethical considerations for my thesis surround the participants and the sensitive, subjective nature of the discussions around the use of their networks. These considerations act as a bridge in the chapter between the positioning of the thesis and the methods used to gather data to answer the research questions. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, the participants reflect on their relationships and this position is discussed with regards to myself as an active teacher, and recognising the vulnerabilities exposed during the interview process and the need for my ethical reflexivity.

The design of the study is considered in line with these ethical considerations and the methods for the data collection and analysis are presented in the last section of the chapter. The discussions here connect the ontological and epistemological positions with the appropriateness of the research methods to ensure trustworthiness in the findings. This section critically explains the decisions for a wholly qualitative approach to the design which relies on the successful outcome of the researcher-participant interviews. I draw on the work of researchers, such as Gauntlett (2007, pg. 39), who highlight the significance of using mediating objects in research to encourage authenticity in the interview process. I present the mediating object as the network map drawn out by the participants and explain my rationale for using this mapping process as a scaffolding for authentic discussion in the interview. Towards the end of

the chapter, the use of narrative and thematic approaches to analysis are discussed and I justify their use to honour the authenticity and ensure trustworthiness in the findings of my study.

3.2 Philosophical and Theoretical Decisions

To understand how a teacher views their own network and the influence those relationships have within the workplace, my study needs to adopt a methodology that gains insight into the level of connectedness of the teachers and how the experience and nature of their relationships influences them. The interest of the study is not to look at the model of networks specifically but at the perceptions of the participants within them. To authentically capture this insight, I chose a qualitative frame, which combines both an interpretivist and social constructionism position combined with that of critical subjectivity. The critical subjectivity is, in the main, a philosophical position recognising my place within the study. As explained in the introduction to the chapter, I have taken critical subjectivity as meaning to be aware of our reality in relation to the interplay of influences around us (Reason, 1994, pg. 334). This reflexive position across the study is necessary to maintain a 'groundedness' with the data generated whilst still recognising the active, co-construction of the knowledge through the interplay between myself and the participants (Finlay, 2002, pg. 531). Therefore, the first section of this chapter will focus the framing of the philosophical and theoretical positions to authentically capture this insight.

3.2.1 Interpretivism with Social Constructionism

As stated earlier one of the broad philosophical underpinnings of my research is that of interpretivism. Crotty (1998, pg. 67) tells us that the interpretivist approach ‘...looks for the culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social-life world.’ This means that through the process of research we are aiming to capture the ‘lived experiences’ of individuals through their interpretations within the social, cultural and historical aspects of their lives (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard & Snape, 2014, pg. 12). According to Waring (2012, pg. 18), interpretivism is a collective of approaches of social reality which are opposite to a positivist perspective. I consider my research to be capturing the lived social reality of the participants, and, whilst social reality could be considered from a positivistic perspective of external constraints and structures, this thesis is created within the lived experiences and social world of the participants and the social reality which only exists through their interpretations of it (Denscombe, 2002, pg. 18). For Crotty (1998, pg. 41), positivist research holds an underlying assumption of absolute knowledge through scientific method, all of which enables control and predictability through the generalisability of the findings. However, I am not conducting an intervention study where I measure cause and effect but am looking to capture an understanding of experiences and their interpreted meanings. Crotty (1998, pg. 67) tells us that the interpretivist approach is looking for the cultural and historical interpretations of the world of the participants. I am, rather than objectively observing the ‘world’ of the participants, using the research process to allow for the participants to interpret their own meanings of their experiences. By doing so, these interpretations are all captured within the snapshot of time of the

research (Williams & May, 1996, pg. 65). I feel that it is important to note here that I am not dismissing or trying to simplify a positivist approach, which, as suggested by Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, pg. 71), often happens in qualitative research, but rather explain my reasoning for focusing on the 'narratives' of my participants. Denzin and Lincoln (2018, pg. 19) tell us that all research is interpretive and the paradigm for research is 'guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied.' They apply the term paradigm to the combined collective of the researcher's ontological, epistemological, and methodological approaches. These various paradigms will all have particular demands and therefore dictate the form that questions will be asked and how the interpretations from the research will be made (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, pg. 19).

In positioning my approach for this study, I consider my participants to have constructed their social reality through their interaction with it and the meaning has been constructed through the action of interpreting it (Crotty, 1998, pg. 43). This action of interaction and interpretation, Crotty (1998, pg. 42) defines as constructionism, in that '...all knowledge, and therefore, all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context.' This means that the social reality of the participants is their interpretations of their lived reality, and the research experience captures the process of their reflections. Through the research process and their deeper analysis of it, the participants 'construct(ed) meaning' (Crotty, 1998, pg. 44). LeCompte and Preissle (2008, pg. 31) explain that within qualitative inquiry we are concerned with 'meaning' and the ways to 'explain, translate, and interpret perceived reality.' Therefore, it is not

the interpretations of myself, alone, as practitioner-researcher, but rather the descriptions, explanations and meanings ascribed by me and the participants, both collectively and apart (LeCompte and Preissle, 2008, pg. 32). Denzin and Lincoln (2018, pg. 20) consider this approach to fall within a constructivist paradigm which holds 'a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures' and I would agree. My study is designed to generate data through the research process with the participants and whilst it is the participants themselves who will construct their views through their own interpretations of their experiences, there is a co-construction between me and the participants at play. These experiences will always be historical and through the active reflection of them, the participants will gain further insight into them. Even though Archer (1998b, pg. 199) in her discussions around Critical Realism, deduced that social structures are not uncovered by interviewing participants in depth, Gergen (2003, pg. 148) promoted the use of the outward view of subjectivity when considering the discourse and shared meanings generated through participant interactions within the interview process. Therefore, the narrative or 'stories' generated hold a great deal of insight not only into the day to day lives of the participants but also their interpretations of them. It is this process of interaction, as well as the words themselves, which will shape the findings of the study through the narrative analysis of the data.

3.2.1.1 *The Complexity Paradigm*

Teaching requires a level of emotional commitment (Day & Gu, 2010, pg. 192) and the aim of my study is for teachers to explore their networks and to identify the use and impacts of their networks and relationships within the workplace. Networks and relationships, as discussed in chapter 2, are a landscape of interactions and these can be varied and complex (see Wellman, 2007). Morrison (2008, pg. 20) introduces complexity as a way to look at systems, not through a positivist, linear perspective, but one that is much more holistic and organic. Whilst positivist research may identify a linear causality, my study is more aligned to the complex nature of a teacher's network and the level of influence the relationships will have. This reflects Byrne and Callaghan's position (2014, pg. 200) of complexity in social science research '...rather than attempting to develop a positivist logic of inquiry in qualitative social science, the way forward lies in the development of an exploratory and interpretive approach...' As I suggested earlier, I am not looking at the 'wide field' of whole networks rather using the individual network of the participants as a mechanism for understanding the influences of the experiences within them. For Cohen, Manion & Morrison, (2011, pg.29) the key components in the complexity paradigm are: connection, feedback and emergence. Byrne and Callaghan (2014, pg. 30) refer to this as 'autopoiesis' where a system is in a constant state of renewal through its interaction with its environment. Archer (2017, pg. 11) considers this from the perspective of morphogenesis and the opportunities for human flourishing. I am interested in finding the connected nature of teachers within and outside the workplace and understanding how the role of these connections provide feedback through the flow of resources and their impact on agency, to enable emergence of the teachers' capacity for resilience.

3.2.1.2 Ontological and Epistemological Divide

When considering philosophical positions in research, Bhaskar tells us (1998) ‘...ontology is dependent on epistemology since what we can know to exist is merely a part of what we can know’ (pg. 29). This means that within the interpretivism paradigm there can be a complex dichotomy at the boundary between the ontological and epistemological positions. Using Ormston et al. (2014, pg. 4) as a guide, I consider ontology to be trying to answer the question: ‘what is the nature of the social world and what is there to know about it?’ I would consider the ontological understanding of my study as the nature of the individual relationships and networks from the participants’ perspectives and how their relationships influence them. Returning to Ormston et al. (2014, pg. 4) I am using epistemology to be considering ‘how can we learn about the social world and what is the basis of our knowledge?’ From this epistemological position, learning about the social world of the participants is captured through discussions with them of what their social world looks like and how it influences them.

Clandinin & Rosiek (2007, pg. 39) mirror the position of Bhaskar, when they suggest that the narratives around experiences are only valid in the context of the way the participants are experiencing their reflections of them, and this will result in a new interpretation of experience. This would mean, therefore, that the process of reflection is much more interactional than *a priori*, in that, rather than just a deduction of the experience, it is the experience of the reflection and discussion which will affect their interpretations and understanding (ibid.). Waring (2012, pg. 18) also highlights this challenge between these distinctions where the research process and me as

practitioner-researcher blurs the divide between 'what to know' and 'how to know'. This is because in interpretivist study 'what can be known is inextricably linked with the interaction between a particular (researcher) and a particular (participant)' (ibid.). This means that the outcome of my approach in this study can never represent an objective reality but only a subjective interpretation, where the subjectivity is my positionality as well as that of the participants, all combined within the context of the research process (Ormston et al., 2014, pg. 8).

3.2.2 Critical Subjectivity

Braun and Clarke (2013, pg. 9) consider successful qualitative research to require a 'sensibility' which is orientated towards 'process and meaning'. This requires an 'eye' towards reflection and reflexivity by the researcher to ensure they pay attention to 'what is said' by the participants, whilst recognising their own 'cultural membership' of the 'shared values and assumptions' which they both hold (ibid.). This position reflects those of Bhaskar (1998, pg. 29) and Waring (2012, pg. 18) in 3.2.1.2, who highlights the need for attention to be made to myself as researcher and my experiences as a teacher. This is because of the 'blurring' across the ontological and epistemological positions due to the subjective nature of interpretative research. Therefore, in this section I will explore the philosophical position of 'critical subjectivity', which has its origins in participatory and co-operative inquiry research, to retain an awareness of my subjectivity within the study.

Participatory and co-operative inquiry are forms of research which challenge the divide between researchers and 'the researched' (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2010, pg. 1). This type of human inquiry involves groups of people, often referred to as co-

researchers, who explore a particular problem or question together (Reason, 1988, pg. 18). For clarification, my study is not adopting a participatory methodology *per se* and whilst there is an element of co-construction of the data through the research interaction between me and the participants, my participants are not co-researchers, in that, they are not shaping the design and form of the study as we are not generating 'shared solutions to shared problems' (Munn-Giddings, 2012, pg. 73). Reason (1999, pg. 207) summarises the process of participatory and co-operative inquiry as one of learning through 'research cycling' and 'a paradoxical self-reflexive quality of attention'. He is referring here to questions such as: 'how do I know what I know?'; 'who am I that is engaged in this knowing?'; 'do I actually do what I think that I do?' Reason (1999, pg. 220) considers these questions central in the process of inquiry but unanswerable through 'sequential logic'. Within participatory research methodologies there is an embodiment of process to paying attention and reflecting as a form of 'transformative reflexivity' (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2010, pg. 17). This is a conceptual frame which relates to the process of reflexivity with the intention for deeper learning and understanding (ibid.). Reason (1999, pg. 212) calls this 'Critical Subjectivity' where he urges '...we do not have to throw away our living knowledge in the search for objectivity but are able to build on it and develop it.' This has relevance within my study because, rather than disregarding my own knowledge of schools and professional networks, it could be viewed as an asset in the study. This is because understanding the political hierarchies within the complexity of school networks, as discussed by Robson and McCartan (2016, pg. 4), allows me to recognise patterns in behaviour and commonality in experiences across my participants. However, there is a danger that the asset of knowledge is also coupled with my own bias, through my

own experiences, and throughout the study it is important these are kept in balance through a process of 'checking in' with myself regularly (Reason, 1999, pg. 213).

3.2.2.1 The Ways of Knowing

Within the participatory paradigm, Reason (1999, pg. 212) tells us, the subjective influence is central in the inquiry process to improve 'the quality of knowing' and the improvement for the 'quality of knowing' begins with the 'research cycling'. This is the action of moving through, often over many cycles, 'four ways of knowing' as proposed by Heron (1996, pg. 57). These ways of knowing, called an 'extended epistemology', extends the 'how to know' beyond the theoretical and are labelled as experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical forms (Reason, 1999, pg. 211). Experiential knowing is knowing through experience and involves a direct encounter and occurs 'through empathy and resonance' whereas presentational knowing is the external translation of the experiential knowing, through expression of meaning in our language and narrative (Reason, 1999, pg. 211). Propositional knowing involves our knowledge and understanding of theories and ideas and practical knowing is about competence, knowing how to do something (ibid.). As Reason (1999, pg. 211) states inquiry can create any of these types of knowledge but emphasises the benefits of using them congruently to reflect on during the inquiry process. He suggests that '...[co-operative] inquiry will be more valid – richer, deeper, more true to life, and more useful' (1999, pg. 211) where there has been a research cycling of action and reflection through 'looking at experience from different angles, developing different ideas, trying different ways of behaving' (ibid., pg. 212). I consider this action of 'research cycling' a way of maintaining a balance between knowledge and bias, as it

forms an important layer in the construction and analysis of the narratives of the participants.

3.2.2.2 Critical Attention

In addition to research cycling, Reason also suggests that there should be a balance of action and reflection, and developing critical attention (1999, pg. 212). On the need for a balance of action and reflection, Reason tells us: 'too much time in reflection is just armchair theorizing; too much time in action is mere activism' (ibid.). This means the process of reflecting on experiences should bring about an action based on those reflections, and that action should be rooted in purpose based on the outcomes of the experiences. In a similar vein, Finlay (2002, pg. 541) urges us to 'strike a balance, striving for self-awareness but eschewing navel gazing'. This 'critical attention', which Reason (1999, pg. 212) describes as '...looking at experiences with affectionate curiosity with the intention of understanding it better' is to ensure that we do not become so attached to the experiences, that we cannot look at them critically. Within these cycles of reflection and action, Reason (1999, pg. 213) warns of the possibility of distress. As he explains in the context of co-operative inquiry 'if the co-researchers are willing to examine their lives and their experience in depth and in detail, it is likely that they will uncover things they have been avoiding looking at and aspects of their life with which they are uncomfortable.' Whilst Reason is discussing this issue with respect to co-researchers, in my study I am considering this from the perspective of the participants and in 3.3.1 I discuss this further from the perspective of avoiding harm through my research. In the context of critical subjectivity, however, it means that this risk of distress can result in 'fooling oneself', which applies to both the

participants and me as the researcher (Reason, 1999, pg. 211). He explains further: 'This notion of critical subjectivity means that there will be many versions of "reality" to which people may hold with a self-reflexive passion' (Reason, 1994. pg. 334), which can result in all the ways that people fool themselves and others about their perceptions of reality. It will be interesting to see how this relates to my participants, especially in relation to the narratives captured during the interview process.

Whilst Reason is discussing this in reference to collectives of people working together, I am focused on considering critical subjectivity from the perspective of my own subjective position but also acknowledge that of the participants. My participants will have their own subjectivity, their own motivations, their own experiences, their own agency, and their own autonomy. Braun and Clarke (2013, pg. 36) summarise this subjectivity in qualitative research: 'They [the participants] are not robots; we [the researchers] are not robots – we're all living, breathing, subjective human beings, partial in our knowledge, and flawed.' My study will capture, in the context of the research questions, this subjectivity, however it may not capture the criticality of it from the participants perspectives. As Reason (1994, pg. 334) explains, a risk in research is that 'to inquire carefully and critically into those things which we care about is an anxiety-provoking business which stirs up our psychological defences. We then project our anxieties onto the world we are supposed to be studying...'. He is arguing here about one of the problematic positions within participatory and co-operative inquiry, that of 'collective collusion' (ibid.). He describes 'collective collusion' where collective anxiety results in collective defence which, however, may be lacking in critical judgement. As practitioner-researcher, by being critically aware,

it is imperative that I not only check my bias and prejudices, but I also question the basis of why these might exist.

Taylor (2003, pg. 264) provides an insight into the purpose of critical subjectivity, where she draws on the varying positions of Foucault and Kant: 'practices of the self must not only bring about change, but in doing so must call into question the necessity of current modes of thought and action' (pg. 264). Boland emphasises that for there to be 'new tones, new ways of looking, new ways of doing' (2007, pg. 28), embracing the subjective is an essential component for critiquing existing structures of power and knowledge. Here Boland is promoting the use of prior knowledge, but with a critical reflection, to gain new insight and a new dimension to the knowledge. This will be an important factor during the analysis of my data, in that, understanding the experiences of the participants could bring my own similar experiences to the fore. Through the process of analysis, I may need to challenge my own bias and assumptions, considering the new knowledge and new interpretations made by the participants. This highlights the importance of the 'research cycling' discussed earlier through the ways of knowing as presented by Reason (1999, pg. 211): through the action of attention to the ways of knowing, my intentions are to remain open and humble to challenge and alternative views. Reason explains (1994, pg. 335) 'the [research cycling] application does not mean that the experiential, practical or propositional knowing which comes out of the research is valid in any absolute sense of the term, but rather that it is possible to see more clearly and communicate to others the perspective from which that knowing is derived, and to illuminate the distortions which may have occurred.' Reason is presenting critical subjectivity, epistemologically, by asking 'how the subject can know what they know?' For Reason,

the action of paying critical attention to where the knowledge has originated and how the experiences have manifested themselves becomes knowledge. However, Boland, is referring to critical subjectivity from its philosophical positioning: 'part of philosophy is a *detachment* from what is accepted as true' (2007, pg. 28) and that, for him, is through the action of critique. He draws on the writings of Butler and suggests that critique only 'occurs where a subject runs up against a crisis in epistemological status' (2007, pg. 28). This is an important consideration in my study for me and my participants. I need to consider whether I 'checked in' with myself and my thinking only where I considered things to be hard or 'in epistemological crisis', such as, defining the boundary between interpretivism and constructionism or recognising the relevance of social capital in social control and coercion. I may question myself now: 'did I pause for reflection when the road was straight or only when a reflexive action was a required at a turn?' When considering my participants, the research process requires of them a critique, to challenge what they knew and understood about their network and professional relationships, but to what extent will they 'embrace' the opportunity and will they fall into the trap, Reason (1999, pg. 212) suggested, of 'fooling themselves'.

It is these questions which Lee (2014, pg. 1427) highlights as part of the reason why subjectivity in research can be considered problematic and something to be either avoided or controlled. However, the subjectivity of the 'me' and the participants are central in my study. Lee suggests '...no one has complete objective knowledge; no two people have the same standpoint; and one must not take his/her standpoint for granted' (2014, pg. 1428). Lee continues to use this position to show subjectivity in a positive light as a way of providing a 'window to a larger social and economic world

around us' (pg. 1428). He suggests that through the acknowledgment of subjectivity, rather than dismissing or trying to make it objective 'we become mindful of its enabling and disabling potential when engaging in teaching, research, or any other activities' (2014, pg. 1429).

Boland (2007, pg. 130) used a geometric model to explain the positioning of critical subjectivity. His model was one of a Gnomon, which is a parallelogram within a parallelogram. This represents, metaphorically, the sense of the self within the self. Lee (2014, pg. 1430) refers to Mead's terminology of 'I' and 'me', where 'I', as represented by Boland's larger parallelogram, is the 'locus of pure subjectivity and agency'. The 'me', as represented by Boland's (2007) inner parallelogram, is 'an objectified self, understood from the perspective of others...it is always socially and culturally mediated' (pg. 1430). Boland used the gnomonic model to metaphorically demonstrate the cycle of rupture in critical subjectivity; as the smaller shape breaks away from the larger through the process of critique, instigated, by the 'epistemological crisis' (2007, pg. 28) discussed earlier. This 'void' is then replaced, still in the same shape, but its image altered through the process of critique. Boland's gnomonic illustration bears the same hallmarks of 'process' as Reason's (1999, pg. 212) 'research cycling'. For me, the process of challenge to what can be known involves a transformation of what was known, replaced with a what is now known. Lee (2014, pg. 1430) suggests that the more 'me' which can be laid bare and considered through the process of critique, the more of the 'I' can be unveiled. However, Boland (2007, pg. 129) uses Nietzsche's metaphor of 'skin shedding' to demonstrate this 'renewal' but warns of the 'distress' that Reason (1994, pg. 334) also referred to. Boland (2007, pg. 130) suggests 'if critique entails the resentment of old

errors', this could lead to a Nietzsche 'nihilism'. This would be considered 'very severe judgement indeed' (ibid.), as Nihilism is a rejection of all principles, a belief that life is meaningless and that nothing in the world has a real existence. This is a situation I would want to avoid. The intention is for my research to be emancipatory for both myself and the participants, however paying attention to this possible outcome is part of the cycle of 'checking in' through the process of Reason's (1999, pg. 212) 'research cycling' discussed earlier.

With these considerations in mind, I now turn my attention to the ethical positions in my study. In 3.1 I explained that I considered my ethical considerations to act as a bridge in the thesis between my philosophical positions and my choice of methods to capture the experiences and interpretations of my participants. Therefore, this next section will explain the ethical considerations in advance of my discussion around the design of my study.

3.3 Ethics and Ethical Considerations

This discussion around the ethical considerations and approaches sits within this chapter as a bridge between the methodology and research design. This position reflects its function to illustrate the reflexivity between the ontological and epistemological dilemmas in my study. These dilemmas revolve around balancing the needs of participants and the importance assigned to the research (Kvale, 1996, pg. 110).

My study is exploring the lived experiences of the participants, with the intention that they will have a positive experience and benefit from their participation (Kvale, 1996, pg. 116). However, there is the possibility of creating negative outcomes, including

stress, harm, or anxiety (Robson and McCartan, 2016, pg. 205). This may be the result of recalling difficult experiences or the feeling of being vulnerable through the exposure of personal information, especially if their disclosure is something they regret later (Kvale, 1996, pg. 116). Therefore, it is important the research design, execution, analysis, dissemination, and communication of the study are all informed by an ethical and moral code of conduct; one which spans the entire research process, not merely as a 'stand-alone' pursuit around the application for ethical approval (Robson and McCartan, 2016, pg. 208). This section begins with a discussion around the framework of my reflexive decisions towards the Ethics which govern the research, and the ethical considerations I used in my approach to this study. Before I continue, I can confirm that ethical approval was applied for using the due process as required by the research University's Ethics Committee and approval for the study was granted.

3.3.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks in Ethics

Guidance in research is governed across a multitude of organisations, whose perspectives are dependent upon the nature of the research they represent and whilst there might be slight differences, there is very little to distinguish between these organisations in terms of ethical conduct and practice (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014, pg. 80). This is because the primary focus is on the duty of care towards the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pg. 62). This revolves around the protection of the participants and to ensure the research 'maximises benefit and minimises harm [to the participants]' (AcSS, 2015, pg.1). Across these frameworks for ethical governance, the importance for respect, competence, responsibility, integrity, and trust is

highlighted. These guiding principles are there to ensure the protection of the rights, dignity and, where possible, the autonomy of the participants (ESRC, 2015, pg. 4). My study has been governed and directed by the ethical procedures of my research University, underpinned by the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) whose Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018) are compiled in conjunction with the Five Ethics Principles of the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS) (2015).

Guillemin & Gillam (2004, pg. 263) distinguish between the need for ethics approval, which they call procedural ethics, and the need for an ethical reflexivity, which they term 'ethics in practice'. Guillemin and Gillam (2004, pg. 267) distinguishes between these varying areas of ethical approaches because they question whether the procedural process is nuanced enough to accommodate the complex nature of qualitative research. Other researchers, such as Reid, Brown, Smith, Cope and Jamieson (2018 pg. 69), also discuss this challenge and advocate adhering to ethical principles which span the entire research process rather than focusing only on the need for approval. Kvale (1996, pg. 117) emphasises this action as the role of the researcher and their moral research behaviour through sensitivity to ethical issues and a committed responsibility towards appropriate responses. Therefore, I felt it was important that I had a framework which would act as a 'moral compass' or an ethical conscience (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014, pg. 107), that is, a guide or series of questions against which I could check-in with myself whenever the need would arise. Researchers often have conceptual ethical frameworks which they use (see Reid, Brown, Smith, Cope & Jamieson, 2018, pg. 70), which Kvale (1996, pg. 112) advises should be broad enough to accommodate the specifics of an 'ethical protocol' yet

considers the specific nature of the research project. Gray (2014, pg. 73) summarises these ethical principles as: ‘avoiding harm, ensuring consent was informed, respecting the privacy, and avoiding the use of deception’ and I use these here as a structure to discuss the anticipated ethical tensions and dilemmas within my research:

3.3.1.1 Avoiding Harm

A fundamental principle of conducting research, according to Kvale, is *beneficence* which he describes as: ‘the sum of the potential benefits to the subject and the importance of the knowledge gained should not outweigh the risk of harm to the subject...’ (1996, pg. 116). There are a variety of potential ways of causing harm to the participants through the context of the research (Gray, 2014, pg. 74). In my study, which is focused on human inquiry through the narratives of lived experiences, I consider the risks to revolve around the participants’ emotional, psychological, and professional well-being. It is important I consider not only my ethical knowledge, as described by Guillemin & Gillam (2004, pg. 263) as procedural ethics, but also my commitment to moral issues and action (Kvale, 1996, pg. 117). This is to ensure that I avoid harm for my participants, as much as possible, and I draw on my own judgements as a researcher from my knowledge as a teacher of the complex and political structures of schools within which the research is situated (Robson & McCartan, 2016, pg. 4).

Risk of Professional Harm

I begin by considering the professional well-being and needs of the participants to feel comfortable and safe enough to discuss their experiences whilst feeling secure in their anonymity (Gray, 2014, pg. 74). Securing the anonymity of the participants is

important to ensure that there would be little risk of identification to avoid the possibility of: 'embarrassment...[workplace] discipline or dismissal' (ibid.). Making sure the participants were clear the information they provided through their disclosures would be confidential and my commitment to their anonymity was evident in the participant information provided, at the point of consent, and again throughout the interview. The logistics of maintaining this anonymity is discussed later in the section 'Respecting Privacy', however ensuring anonymity involved the use of a unique coding structure of documents and records, and the use of aliases to avoid identifying features through the process of analysis. This also extended to not including or reproducing the network map within the thesis. This was to be done as much as possible without distorting the data to such an extent that the meanings and interpretations were not lost or distorted (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014, pg. 96).

The most significant data collection method was the face-to-face interview (3.5.1). Therefore, the location of the interview was important when considering the professional well-being for the participants. The anticipated risk was not only visibility of participation should the interview take place within the school, but this could also attract unwanted attention by colleagues and the possibility of probing questions around the nature of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pg. 91). In order to avoid these negative impacts and the potential for unanticipated harm, the participants were able to decide on the location and time for the interview to take place. The participants were offered space within the research University campus or the possibility of a public setting where we would be able to secure a quiet, conversational space without disruption (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pg. 91). However, all participants felt the most

comfortable within the school setting and arranged their own meeting rooms or classroom spaces.

Risk of Emotional and Psychological Harm

As a teacher I have a great deal of empathy and knowledge of the working lives of the participants. Because of this I have knowledge of the contextual and situational lives of the participants through the understood language and nuanced meanings within schools. Berger (2015, pg. 220) tells us that the result of this can be an encouragement for the participants to disclose and share their experiences. Whilst this has benefits for the authenticity of the research, it also places a responsibility in my role as researcher to ensure the participants do not have any adverse emotional or psychological effects due to their disclosures (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014, pg. 83). I use the phrase 'do not have any adverse' hesitantly because as Silverman (2013, pg. 108) suggests it is impossible to foresee every eventuality and Braun and Clarke (2013, pg. 36) highlight the 'messy business' of qualitative and human inquiry. This means not every risk and every possibility of how the participants could be affected can be anticipated (Silverman, 2013, pg. 108). Therefore, my role in the interview process would require a sensitivity, a reflexivity, with the participants' responses to questions to ensure they would not feel pressured to continue and know they would be able to take a break or to stop the interview at any time (Gray, 2014, pg. 75).

In order to avoid harm anonymity is crucial and this extends into the analysis and findings for the study. As highlighted previously, within the thesis it should be as difficult as possible to identify either the participant or the members of their network they discuss during the interview (Webster, Lewis & Brown, 2014, pg. 86). Because of

the nature of interactions and social networks, the specifics of events can be very individual and as such there is the risk, in the analysis especially, that identification could be possible (Webster, Lewis & Brown, 2014, pg. 98). Therefore, the participants were given the option to preview their transcripts as a form of member checking (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pg. 282). This is where the participants are provided with a copy of the transcripts to review for accuracy and given the opportunity to remove any data they no longer want to be included in the analysis. Weatherall, Gavey & Potts (2002, pg. 535), however, suggest that this reiterative approach can bring with it its own problems as transcripts can appear more abstract than conversational. Therefore, participants can change or 'correct' the transcripts and by doing so, this could result in deleting or altering the 'very stuff' the research is trying to capture. However, none of the participants chose to receive and review their transcripts.

3.3.1.2 Ensuring Consent was Informed

In the previous section 'Avoiding Harm' I discussed the importance for the participants to be aware of the nature and aims of the study as well as understanding their commitments in the gathering of the data (Gray, 2014, pg. 75). This next discussion begins with the 'what' and the 'how' this information was provided to the participants, and this moves into the issues around what is considered informed consent.

Participation Information

Informed consent is imperative to ensure the participants do not feel any anxiety or stress through misunderstanding the nature of the study (Kvale, 1996, pg. 112). My study is focused on the participants' professional relationships and the information provided to the participants explained the study was exploring teacher networks and

the impact this has on their working lives. The participants were provided with information around the length of time that the interview was planned to take and that both pre and post interview questionnaires would also form part of the data collection. This was to ensure the participants were informed of their commitments in terms of time and the nature of data collection methods without an overload on the specifics of the research design and varying forms for analysis (Kvale, 1996, pg. 113). Adopting the approach taken by Guillemin and Gillam (2004) by distinguishing between procedural and 'in practice' ethics, the focus on consent was present in both the formal signing of the consent form and in-practice through the process of interview.

Issues Around Informed Consent

I wanted to ensure that informed consent of participation and understanding that the withdrawal of consent at any point were continual themes in both the formal signing of the consent declaration and checking within the interview. This continuation of consent was imperative in building trust with the participants in the handling of the information they would provide (Gray, 2014, pg. 77). However, Kvale (1996, pg. 113) highlights the dilemma in obtaining informed consent by challenging a dichotomy between the nature of qualitative, exploratory research and being able to predict every event and the impacts in advance. Whilst for the purposes of obtaining ethical approval for the study from the research University a schedule of open-ended questions was submitted as part of the semi-structured interview, Kvale (1996, pg. 113) points out: '[the semi-structured interview] relies on the possibility of following up unanticipated leads from subjects and [therefore] of posing questions not prepared

in advance.’ Equally, one of the dilemmas for me as part of the data gathering was for the narratives to be as authentic and responsive as possible, without risking being ‘contaminated’ through extensive pre-preparation (Silverman, 2013, pg. 99). I discuss later in this section the avoidance of deception, however, in order to address the issues over informed consent raised here, Kvale (1996, pg. 114) advocates the inclusion of informed consent through dialogue that runs throughout the research and promotes a mutuality of understanding between the researcher and the researched. Therefore, at all stages of interaction with the participants, either in the interview or the on-line collection of their data, there was a continual reiteration of their ability to withdraw any information they did not wish to be included.

3.3.1.3 Respecting Privacy

In my ethical framework, I have explained the importance of anonymising the participants and the confidential handling of the information they would provide through the data gathering processes in my study. Whilst informed consent and confidential handling of data and anonymity are considered standard practices across research studies of this type (see BERA 2018, pg. 21), it was important to me to keep in mind the ‘large’ nature of the geographical location of the research yet ‘small’ in terms of network size. This was important because despite the attention made to anonymising the data, as discussed throughout the section on avoiding harm, there could be the possibility of identifying the participants through the content of the conversations or their positions within the schools. Therefore, I now consider the issues around the logistics of anonymity and the problems which could arise.

Logistics of Anonymity

The need for respecting of privacy combined with informed consent is an important feature of Gray's framework on ethical principles (2014, pg. 78). The information provided by the participants should be protected from monitoring and intrusion, and they must have provided their consent for this information to be used. These dilemmas had been addressed through using a unique reference code for each participant, all information obtained was password protected and stored securely on an encrypted database server. The participants were informed, as part of the informed consent procedure, their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time. This included their ability to request the return of their data and access their transcripts and analysis. In addition, the need for anonymity, the use of aliases in excerpts and narratives used within the thesis are there for protection against the risk of harm as well as the respect of the participants' privacy. Going beyond this, the respect of privacy extends not just around the identification of the participant, but also the respectful attention to being invasive in the questions presented to the participants. Kadushin (2005, pg. 140) identifies this issue with respect to the rise of interest in the social network research where he highlights 'in standard practice social science research, anonymity and confidentiality are both routinely granted to respondents, informants, and subjects in experiments and observations.' However, he suggests that 'ethical issues are both straightforward and complex' (ibid.), this means when considering the ethics around social network research, there are two areas which could be troublesome: the background context is important to the narrative, and there will be individuals who do not know they are being named (Borgatti and Molina, 2003, pg. 339). There is no additional solution from any of the authors around

these complex issues in social network analysis beyond those which are afforded through ethical research practices, that is, avoidance of harm, informed consent, and respecting privacy, all which hinge on anonymity and confidentiality. Borgatti and Molina (2003, pg. 109) raise this issue in their discussion around ethics in social network analysis: 'a small number of attributes can uniquely identify individuals'. Within close communities and small organisations, 'everyone knows everyone else' (ibid., pg. 141). Therefore, I chose not to include the participants' network maps or reproduce them to avoid these complications. Even though I do not consider my research as a social network study, the issues raised here are important to consider around protecting the anonymity of the participants and their networks members. Therefore, I would pay careful attention to the extracts used in the thesis to ensure, where appropriate, the network members would be ungendered and specific instances would be paraphrased to avoid identification.

Privacy within Interpretation and Analysis

In interpretivist studies, there is a dilemma in the analysis between where the boundary lies regarding the privacy of what participants disclose and the interpretations of them (Weatherall, Gavey & Potts, 2002, pg. 536). The authors are postulating here about the conflicts between interpretations of discourse and subjectivity. That there are two 'subjectivities' at play was discussed earlier in the 3.2.2 'Critical Subjectivity'; that of myself and that of the participants. Therefore, the conflict arises across whether the participants are 'telling truths about their experiences or their selves' (ibid.) and if the analysis 'may be interpreted as silencing participants' voices and implying that the researcher's view is somehow more authentic than or

superior to that of the researched.’ (ibid.). Therefore, moving beyond the ideas around preserving identity when considering the privacy of my participants, it is also important to respect their right to disclose whatever interpretation they decide to provide as part of the study.

3.3.1.4 Avoiding the Use of Deception

Avoiding deception in research is a dilemma which, according to Gray (2014, pg. 80), is difficult to ‘...draw a line between outright deception and being less than honest with the truth.’ An example he gives is not being clear how long an interview is planned to take. Gray makes it clear that not being honest about the research with the participants is ‘infringing their human rights’ (2014, pg. 80) and, in the previous section on informed consent, it was clear that consent is considered informed as it is given based on the information provided about the nature of the research study. If the information is not true, then that would be considered *deception* (Robson & McCartan, 2016, pg. 216). Within the medical profession, criticism over the way that information is presented around research data, for example, in the USA and the State policies around abortions, can be considered as resulting in ‘misinformed consent’ by patients (Daniels, Ferguson, Howard and Roberti, 2016, pg. 202). Gray makes a similar claim (2014, pg. 80) around the risk of ‘...[researchers] avoid being completely candid with participants [about the research] to elicit the most natural of responses.’ Therefore, the dilemma around ‘deception’ could span across false claims such as stating that the research is different to what it is or purposefully not including relevant information (Robson & McCartan, 2016, pg. 216). In fact, Weatherall, Gavey & Potts

(2002, pg. 535) suggest the information presented to the participants could be so broad and vague that informed consent could be inferred for anything.

Robson and McCartan (2016, pg. 216) widen the discussion over deception and its justification through the consideration of the 'cost-benefit approach' to ethics, that is the balance between the benefits gained through knowledge and the costs to the participants. As Gray (2014, pg. 80) explained earlier, for research to be truly reflective of the experiences it is aiming to capture, there must be an authenticity through elicitation of the most natural responses by the participants. My study is an interpretative one which is aiming to capture the use of networks on the lives of middle leaders in schools. Therefore, I am not capturing the experience 'in action' but I am capturing it 'in-reflection'. The dilemma here in my study around deception, for me, is the amount of preparation I allowed, or in fact lack of, for the participants. I chose not to disclose the specific questions of the interview, mainly because it was intended as semi-structured with a conversational rather than question-answer type scaffold (Weatherall, Gavey & Potts, 2002, pg. 535). Therefore, I wanted to capture 'real-time' reflections rather than prepared or constructed responses and these issues around the choice of methods are discussed further in the research design. Guillemin & Gillam (2004, pg. 263) suggest that procedural ethics, that is, the approval process for conducting the research, once achieved can absolve the researcher from further attention to ethical attentions. However, following the train of thought of Gray (2014, pg. 80), throughout the gathering of the narratives it is important to be clear around the purpose of the questions during the interview. Whilst Robson and McCartan (2016, pg. 217) suggest that in some cases being too specific to avoid deception can result in biased data, there needs to be a sensitivity and trust in place between myself

and the participants. This means I have a moral responsibility to ensure that the participants are providing consent, through a true understanding of the study and the reason for my questions, and that they are clear on how I will be using their stories for analysis.

3.4 Participant Selection and Recruitment

The intention of the study was to gather a range of narratives around the use of networks by participant teachers. Whilst this is a qualitative study and is not trying to establish a strategy or intervention for how to use a network, my aim was to use the idea of the network to gain insight into the relationships of teachers and the impact these have on their working lives. Therefore, my study design does not involve any quantitative analysis or trying to establish a causality but is a small-scale study which is exploring, through narratives, the experiences of teachers in schools. According to Braun and Clarke (2013, pg. 50) the amount of data required for a study should consider the amount of data gathered from each participant and the richness of data, as well as the type of analysis needed. Silverman (2013, pg. 44) agrees with this position as he suggests that the issue within qualitative research is not much the sample size but the ability to capture an 'authenticity' when understanding experiences. Braun and Clarke (2013, pg. 48) consider 6-10 interviews to be sufficient for studies whose main data collection is through interviews and is adopting a thematic approach in analysis. In the case of my study the factors I felt I needed to take into consideration when selecting my participants were: the gathering of a range of narratives and experiences from teachers across the research region; the research location is geographically large, therefore it needed to be feasible in terms of travel

commitments for the number of participants involved; the potential workload for co-ordination of interview and transcription time without running into the possibility of overloading the study with repeating narratives; and to accommodate the possibility of some participants been too closely connected within their networks or early dropouts from the study. With these considerations in my mind, I explore further in the next section the decisions made around participant selection.

3.4.1 Participant Selection

In 1.4 I explained the rationale behind the middle leader participants involved within the study. Brown, Boyle and Boyle (1999) suggest their role acts as a channel of communication between senior leadership and their department colleagues, which I considered could provide some visibility of the variety of networks and relationships within schools. I felt that understanding their established networks due to the number of years they have been in teaching, combined with their experiences of the challenges they face could make a significant contribution to the wider discussion on teacher retention. This career phase of teachers was also of interest within this study because, whilst there are some empirical studies (see Irvine & Brundrett, 2017), they appeared to be an under-researched group (Gurr and Drysdale, 2012, pg. 57). Where there is literature about this collective of teachers, there is contention over the challenges they face which is spread across a broad continuum of security, confidence, and resilience to conflict with promotion, career paths, and varying family pressures (Rosenholz & Simpson, 1990; Huberman, 1993; Hargreaves, 2005; Day & Gu, 2010). Day and Gu (2010, pg. 85) suggest that across mid-career teachers, among those of between 8 and 23 years of teaching, the majority would have 'additional

administrative responsibilities' (ibid., pg. 86). Here Day and Gu suggested these groups of teachers were often at a crossroads of whether to remain committed to the profession for the long term or reduce their commitment and possibly consider leaving all together (ibid., pg. 87). The dilemmas, which teachers in this career phase face, often revolve around balancing their work-life tensions or reconciling themselves with the possibility of 'stagnating' (ibid., pg. 85). Teachers with more than 23 years' experience were categorised as 'veteran teachers' (ibid., pg. 105) where Day and Gu (2010, pg. 106) suggest this group of teachers often struggled against feelings of 'resentment at being forced to jump through hoops' as new initiatives are introduced. The impact of external policies, work-life tensions, and student behaviour were also highlighted as drivers for this phase of teachers in considering early retirement or part-time working (ibid., pg. 108). I anticipated that I would have across my participants a range of ages and experiences. Therefore, I wanted to gather participants from across a range of schools, subject disciplines, responsibilities, and working hours to capture a wide range of narratives.

3.4.2 Approaches to Recruitment

A range of strategies were adopted for the recruitment of the participants and this approach was taken to minimise the effect of non-respondent bias, that is only attracting potential participants who are connected to a specific network (Watanabe, Olson & Falci, 2017, pg. 324). I felt that these 'hidden populations' of teachers who are not socially active within their workplace could provide a balance of narratives against those who were (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pg. 58). The location of the study was established as the North West of England and the strategies ranged from a blanket

approach of communication with schools who were in partnership with the research University to the use of social media as a way of circulating the study information to teachers directly.

Whilst adopting a range of strategies was initially designed to avoid only recruiting participants in a distinct network, recruiting teachers into the study was problematic with workload as the most cited reason for non-participation. This meant that the wide range of approaches that were used to recruit the participants resulted in a collective of teachers who received the information about the study from different sources. Each of the strategies for recruitment are presented and discussed below. They are ordered in the sequence in which the study information was distributed:

- Partnership Schools with the Research University:

Head teachers at partnership schools with the research University were contacted to ask for distribution of the study to their staff. The partnerships schools included both state primary and secondary schools within the geographical location of the study. This communication was initially as a letter, with follow-up phone calls and e-mails. Within the primary sector, there was a reluctance from the head teachers to share the information with their staff due the workload pressures and priorities as they prepared themselves for the year ahead: working through new curricula, examination, and inspection processes. There was a similar response from the secondary schools in the area, except for one secondary school whose head teacher responded that they would 'gladly' distribute the information. However, no teachers from the school returned an expression of interest in participating in the study.

- Research University's Alumni of Teacher Graduates:

An on-line registration process for the study was e-mailed to the University's alumni and was sent to the graduates via the administration department at the research University to avoid disclosure of personal data. The e-mail was distributed to teacher graduates who had qualified from the University in 2011 or earlier as this captured the minimum number of years in teaching detailed in 3.4.1 Participant Selection. The e-mail also highlighted the need to be working within state schools within the locality of the research. This strategy resulted in two participants expressing interest in the study, both middle leaders in local secondary schools.

- Use of Personal Contacts:

Alongside the alumni distribution, there was also a distribution of the participant information about the study through my personal contacts. I asked colleagues if they would be willing to share the information by forwarding the participant information e-mail across their own networks. To maintain a minimal network distance between myself and the participants, I only selected those with whom I had very limited personal contact within our own networks. I discuss this further in the next section on recruitment challenges, however for the purpose of the discussion here, this was an important boundary in the recruitment of the participants; not only maintaining some objectivity within the research, but also so that I did not appear within the network data during the interview. Only middle leaders responded. Using the selection criteria of

social distance detailed above, a further four participants within secondary schools across the region were recruited.

- Use of Twitter

Finally, the study details were made available through Twitter. This was shared across my own network and then shared across the Twitter networks of others.

Whilst several teachers responded, the criteria around selection meant that I gained a further participant, again a middle leader from another local secondary school.

3.4.3 Recruitment Challenges

The experience of numerous recruitment strategies was challenging in terms of the ethical considerations and maintaining a rigour and trustworthiness within the study. Whilst interviews with work colleagues or friends is not necessarily discouraged in qualitative research, 'acquaintance interviews' bring with them additional ethical issues around disclosure and objectivity (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pg. 87). Therefore, my participants were selected outside of my own network. This was to reduce the possibility of being part of their shared stories or have information disclosed to me which was potentially 'new' or 'confidential' about close friends (Braun & Clark, 2013, pg. 67). This was important for me to maintain an objective distance across the study in terms of the descriptive and interpretative aspects in the reflection of their stories (Berger, 2015, pg. 231). Through the participant recruitment challenges, it remained important to me that the study gave a breadth of experiences, rather than just within a particular subject discipline, a particular school, or a particular network. The need for boundaries across participant selection also meant the study could not be

dominated by colleagues within my own teaching school, even though for the purposes of recruitment this would have been a simpler process. Equally, all the participants could not come from a particular network, for example a platform such as Twitter. Whilst the participants from a single network may provide a narrative of teachers across a range of experiences, they have a singular link which would dominate the network aspect of the study. Therefore, the final participants were selected to enable stories which allowed individual teachers to explore their networks and ensure their narratives did not become distorted within the descriptions and analysis of others within the study.

3.4.4 Participant Demographics

The study consisted of seven participants and table (1) details the demographics of the participants:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Years of Teaching</i>	<i>Middle Leader Position</i>	<i>Highest Qualification</i>	<i>FT/PT</i>	<i>Career Change</i>
Anna	Female	White British	43	20	Head of Art & Photography	PGCE	FT	No
Julie	Female	White British	41	19	Head of Science	PGCE	FT	No
Linda	Female	White British	55	30	Head of Computing	EdD	FT	No
Matt	Male	White British	44	8	Head of History	PGCE	FT	Yes
Paul	Male	White British	31	9	Head of Music	PGCE	PT (0.8)	No
Peter	Male	White British	53	7	Head of Year	PGCE	FT	Yes
Samantha	Female	White British	50	28	Head of English	PGCE	FT	No

Table (1): Summary of Participants

The participant demographics were collated across the initial expression of interest and the initial on-line questionnaire, which was collected prior to the face-to-face interview. The purpose in the overall strategy for the study of the on-line questionnaire is discussed in 3.5.2 as the information gathered served several functions. However, for the purpose of this section, which is focused on the demographics of the participants, the information gathered enabled me to demonstrate the variation of voice, in terms of gender, age, time in teaching and so on, across the middle leaders. All the participants were state secondary school middle leaders, four female and three male and, except for one who was a pastoral lead, all were subject leads. One participant had also become an Assistant Head between agreement onto the study and the completion of the face-to-face interview. However, they did retain their middle leader responsibility, and, on this basis, I continued their participation.

Having established the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the study and explored the ethical considerations with regards to both the participants and their data, I will now present and discuss the research design. This will include a rationale for combined methods adopted to capture the participants narratives and the forms of analysis I used to ensure an authenticity of participant voice.

3.5 Research Design

The design of the study needs to capture the narratives of the participants around the networks within which they work to understand the nature and influence of them. This design should reflect the interpretative and social constructionist principles discussed in 3.2 and, therefore the qualitative approaches of on-line questionnaires

and semi-structured interviews incorporating open-ended questions were selected as the most appropriate (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pg. 78). Riessman (1993, pg. 54) encourages the use of visual aids, coupled with open questions, to encourage narratives and one of the innovations of the methods in the study was the use of a mapping approach to visualise the participants' networks. This approach was influenced by a technique called Net-Map (Schiffer & Hauk, 2010) and combines the methods of name generation from social network methodology to encourage the participants' narratives (Crossley et al., 2015, pg. 50). The network mapping in this study is an attempt to follow the advice by researchers such as Gauntlett (2007, pg. 39) who are developing thinking in related research methods involving mediating artefacts in interviews. This inclusion of the mapping process as part of the interview process was building on the work of researchers, such as Gauntlett (2007, pg. 39), who encourage authenticity in the interview process using mediating objects to encourage dialogue and narrative. The network map will become the mediating object in the study as a focus for discussion and will form an essential element of the narratives around the participants. Using the network maps alongside semi-structured interviews may be considered similar in many ways to methods such as photo elicitation or video process recall interviewing, where the purpose is to make the conversation more grounded in practice and this may become a small contribution to the development of research methods around qualitative network analysis.

Figure (3) shows the stages of the data gathering methods used in the generation of narrative data with the participants around their networks and relationships.

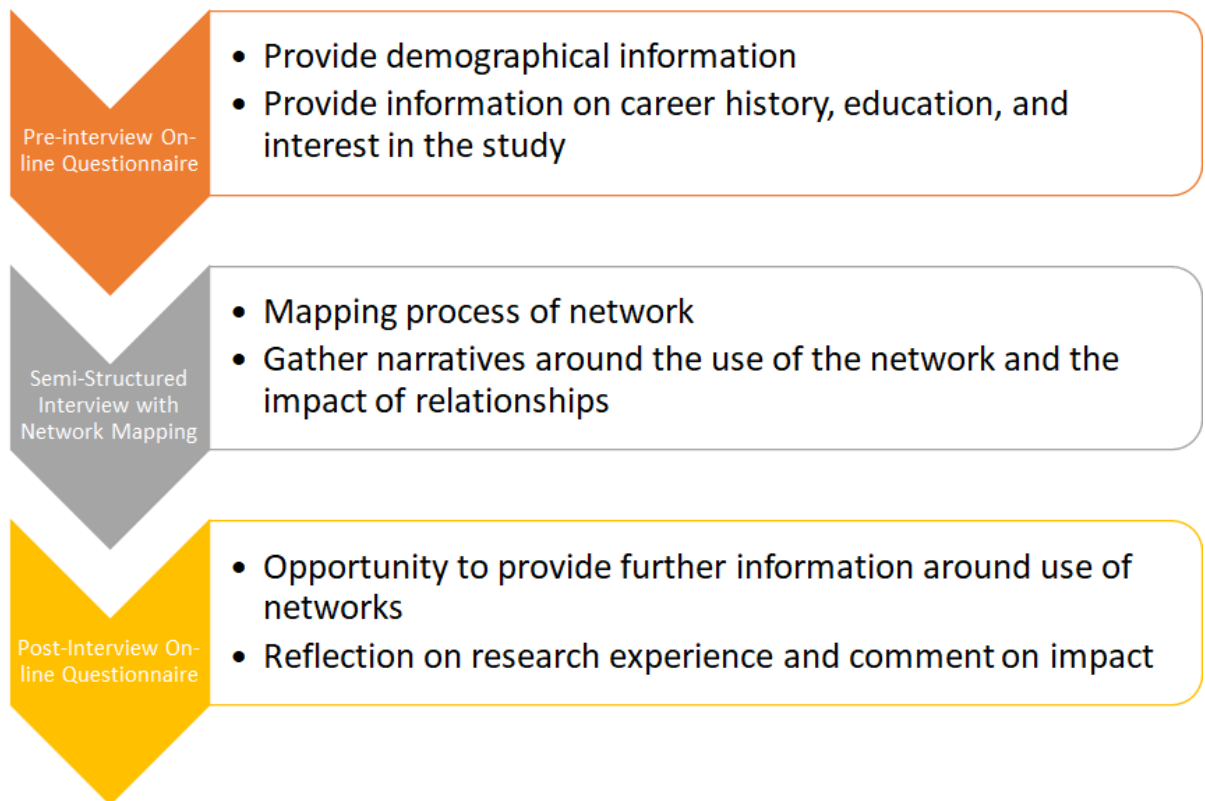


Figure (3): Diagram of Data Gathering Structure

I had previously conducted a pilot study and used an on-line survey system to prepare a series of questions for teachers relating to their self-efficacy and perceptions of their own resilience within the workplace. The purpose of the survey was to investigate the link between self-efficacy and resilience, which was reported through numerous studies to be of significance (Day, 2008; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Gu & Day, 2013; Mansfield et al., 2016; Stanford, 2001; Skaalvick & Skaalvick, 2010). The on-line survey used an established quantitative tool for the measurement of self-efficacy (Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES)) which had been established by Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy (2001) and used in many other studies (see Duffin, French & Patrick, 2012). In addition to the self-efficacy scale instrument, there were three open ended questions for the participants to comment on their own experiences, resilience, and longer-term career plans. The objective for these questions was to gain a deeper

insight into the teachers own experiences and perceptions of their resilience and to connect these perceptions with their score on the self-efficacy scale.

From the analysis of the responses to the questions there did not appear to be any correlation between how the participants scored themselves for self-efficacy and how they described their own experiences of their resilience. However, there were common themes across the detailed descriptions from the participants of their experiences and perceptions which were orientated towards relationships and support within the workplace. There were some considerations made by the participants to their own 'personal' resilience through time management, work-life balances, having a 'cheery disposition' and there was resonance in their answers within the literature of teacher concerns over workload, accountability and the rate of reform and change. However, it was the reported experiences of support and the role of relationships that were consistently present across the comments which were of most significance for the main study. Whilst this pilot used a mixed methods approach, the findings led me to consider in more detail the role of relational resilience (Day & Gu, 2014; Jordan, 2004) and teachers' relationships (van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt & Vanroelen, 2014; Day & Hong, 2016) within their professional networks. The pilot study demonstrated the success in the use of the on-line questionnaire as a way of gathering data as described by Gray (2014, pg. 247) but also highlighted the limitations in being able to construct the deep contextual understanding which arise through the verbal exchanges in face-to-face interviewing (Punch, 2009, pg. 145). Therefore, I wanted a qualitative frame to generate rich data in the design for my main study.

As the figure (3) indicates, the central data gathering method of my study is the interview and is supported by the two on-line questionnaires. The following discussion is structured to demonstrate the rationale behind these methods. It begins with an exploration of the intentions and structure of the combined interview and mapping process and concludes with the rationale for the use of the on-line questionnaires as a means of collecting the demographical and contextual information of the participants as well as their reflections following the interview.

3.5.1 The Interview Process

My study is qualitative in nature and is aiming to gather real-life stories around the lives of the middle leader participants within the context of their professional network. The interview is most prominently used as a data collection method to capture participant narratives (Punch, 2009, pg. 144). This is because it allows for the participants to express their stories and views in a way that is difficult to capture through the on-line survey method discussed previously. The study's aim is to gather an insight into the working lives of middle leaders; it is looking to understand the perspectives from their viewpoint and to explore their experiences and what these mean to them (Kvale, 1996). As Punch (2009, pg. 144) discusses further, to understand the constructions and perspectives of others' realities, it is essential to ask them, and to do so in a way that allows for their answers to demonstrate the rich context of their meanings.

Within qualitative research, interviewing is a common method for data collection; the type of interview and style of interview is a crucial underpinning of the design for the study. This is because an interview, as described by Kvale, is a 'construction site for

knowledge' (1996, pg. 2). Using this metaphor, means that there needs to be a solid foundation as well a structural support through the construction and completion of a conversation of mutual interest with an interchange of views. My pilot study, discussed previously, used a measurement tool around self-efficacy alongside open questions as part of the questionnaire. From the analysis of the responses which were collected through the pilot study, it was the open questions that had generated meaningful data across the participants. Therefore, I wanted to develop this aspect of the study further through utilising interviewing as a method to generate richer narratives.

3.5.1.1 Semi-Structured Interview

There are different forms of interview, and the typology is determined by the extent of its structure and the depth of narrative that it is aiming to achieve (Punch, 2009, pg. 145). A semi-structured interview is one which has the rhythm and flow of an everyday conversation yet has a professional purpose with respect to the interpretations of the central themes of the study (Kvale, 2007, pg. 57). According to Kvale, there are several factors involved in the preparation for, and reflexivity during, qualitative research using semi-structured interviews which are focused on capturing the lived meaning and nuanced accounts of the participants' everyday world (ibid.). These factors were an important aspect in the planning and preparation of the interview schedule, but also the challenges and dilemmas faced during the interview process itself. As has been discussed previously, one of the challenges within this study has been the proximity of my relationship with the participants and, also as an early

career researcher, my awareness of the vulnerabilities of both myself and participants through the interview process.

The interview is a method of data collection and allows for flexibility of the responses from the participants whilst remaining aligned with the intentions of the study (Smith, 1995, pg. 12). Braun & Clarke (2013, pg. 96) suggests, as practitioner-researcher, I encourage empathic conversations to create a sense of shared understandings with the participants of their working lives. This combination is described by Czarniawska (2007, pg. 390) as 'a microsite for the production of narratives.' As my study is attempting to explore the lived experiences of the participants, the generation of stories to assist in the understanding of the experiences were an important facet of the process. One of the considerations through the research design and participant recruitment was a central awareness of the sensitive and confidential nature of the information that would be gathered. For this reason, in 3.3, certain boundaries were created to minimise distress but to also increase the likelihood for authentic and truthful insight into the nature of the participants relationships. However, the participants were fully aware of my own status as an existing teacher and within the relatively small community of education, were also aware of my location as a teacher and they may have relationships with people whom I knew. For this reason, the confidentiality and anonymised nature of the interview and subsequent transcript material in the findings were important facets in gaining trust, especially in the early stages of the interview process. Establishing trust and rapport was essential to gather a richness and depth to the conversation and subsequently the data gathered, it was important for the participants to feel comfortable to 'open up' (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, pg. 316). Whilst this dilemma was discussed in more detail in 3.3 on

ethical considerations, I mention it here as Czarniawska (2007, pg. 390) highlights that research interviews are not guaranteed to generate narratives. Indeed, she points out that interviews can create an atmosphere for avoidance of narratives in comparison to spontaneous conversation. The initial phases of the interview process, according to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006, pg. 316), are essential for building rapport and can result in a final, true connection with the participants in the study and it is at this point that the most lucid conversations can occur. This stage would be reached sooner in the interview process if there was a pre-existing relationship between the researcher and participant, however, Asselin (2003, pg. 100) points out the difficulties which can arise where the participant has a mistrust of a hidden agenda or fear of reprisals.

The issue of self-disclosure and involvement around departmental relationships were integral to the study design. This means the interview schedule needed to be flexible to the pace and sensitive to the 'feel' of it because the aim was to gain an honest insight into the working lives of the participants through their discussions around networks and relationships. Therefore, within the interview there needed to be an additional factor that would allow for authenticity from the participants in their narratives. It was in response to these dilemmas that I selected the semi-structured nature of the questions to create a framework for me to keep a focus for myself and participant on the intentions of the study (Kvale, 2007, pg. 57) whilst using a network mapping technique to allow an informal, conversational atmosphere within the interview (Punch, 2009, pg. 145).

3.5.1.2 Network Mapping

Capturing the authentic voices of participants through the research process can be problematic (Kvale, 1996, pg. 19). Eraut (2000), through extensive research of workplace learning, highlights a problem arising in using semi-structured interviews alone: 'they are more likely to refer to formal learning than non-formal learning' (pg. 119). He suggests the use of mediating objects to help participants '...make sense of their experience and understand issues and alternative perspectives more clearly.' (ibid., pg. 120). To create a visualisation of the teacher's network, I adopted a mapping approach. This was influenced by the Net-Map process, which was developed from a participatory technique that has been used in community developmental research (Campbell, Schiffer & Sullivan, 2014; Hauck, Schiffer & Vandewalle, 2015). In 2.2.2, I presented the use of egocentric maps to explore the personal networks which surround individuals (Lima, 2015, pg. 243). The Net-Map approach can also be used as an egocentric approach (Crossley et al., 2015, pg. 18), and in my study this means that the middle leader is represented as the centre of the network and decides who is present (Moolenaar, 2012, pg. 16). As part of the map creation the names of those within the network would be referred to as 'alters' and the connection between them as 'ties' (Crossley et al., 2015, pg. 2).

During the interview the social network technique of name generation was used so the participant could decide who is included in their map as well as the strength and direction of influence of the ties (Crossley et al., 2015, pg. 21). Using Van Waes et al. (2016, pg. 306) as a guide to the types of questions to ask within a research study to aid name generation and relationship information, I proposed the following structure

as a way of capturing a conversational interviewing technique during the production of the map:

Name (alter or alter-hub)	Relationship/Role of Person	Length of relationship	Strength of tie	Direction of Influence
	What is this person's role? How would you describe your relationship?	How long have you known this person?	Why?	Why?

Table (2): Name Generation Questions

Whilst the map is being built, the process of conversations through semi-structured interview techniques generated data around the relationships of the participants. The use of adopting techniques developed through social network analysis and network mapping in my research is an attempt to follow the advice from researchers on the importance of generating authentic voice and, as I mentioned in the introduction to this section, I draw on the work of researchers, such as Gauntlett (2007, pg. 39), who are developing thinking in related research methods involving mediating artefacts in interviews. During the map building process, as described above, there were opportunities for discussion through the semi-structured questioning over the reason for inclusion of the different alters on the map. To focus the network map on the research questions, some boundaries were drawn because of the potential wide variation in the participants' networks (Wellman, 2007, pg. 349). There was an opening question, such as "over the last year, thinking about your role as teacher, who do you interact with about matters concerning your work, such as, curriculum issues, assessment, experiences with pupils?" This question was used to focus the attention of participants on their work-related networks. As part of the conversational approach to the interviewing, again using the experience of Van Waes et al. (2016, pg.

299) from their study on networked instructors in Higher Education, the following structure was used to generate the narratives of the participants through the format of social network mapping:

Would you feel comfortable discussing issues at work with this person?		How often you discuss your work with this person?			How often do you socialise with this person?			Would you ask/be asked for advice?		
Yes	No	Daily	Week	Month	Daily	Week	Month	Daily	Week	Month
Why would you go to this person? Can you give examples?		What kind of things might you discuss? Can you give examples?			Do you discuss work during these times? Can you give examples?			Would you consider this advice to have had influence? In what way, can you give examples?		

Table (3): Examples of Semi-Structured Questions

The participants were encouraged to use only first names on the map because it would not be practical to anonymise at this stage and I felt could hinder the conversations at this stage. Another anticipated issue was the use of social media and platforms, such as Twitter or organisations such as the College of Teaching. These would not be excluded from the map and for purposes of simplicity I will refer to them as alter-hubs and their significance is analysed as part of the emergent themes from the data.

3.5.2 Open On-line Questionnaires

In figure (3), the structure for generating data in my study, the interview process is supported using two on-line questionnaires: the first being a demographic questionnaire and the second as a reflective questionnaire on the impact of the research process. The purpose of these questionnaires was to provide an opportunity for the participants to provide additional information outside of the interview. The data generation for the study was conducted across a single academic year and the

use of on-line questionnaires was chosen to allow for flexibility in its completion by the participants and ensure that the time commitment was kept as low as possible (Gray, 2014, pg. 247). This also ensured the face-to-face interview was not taken up with 'administrative' questions and there would be no need for a follow-up meeting to review the research experiences of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pg. 49).

The questionnaires, both prior to the face-to-face interview and after, allow the participants to provide both demographic and contextual information as well as reflective data on the impact of the mapping experience. The use of the questionnaires was primarily one of convenience for the participants (Robson & McCartan, 2016, pg. 241). These were designed and completed using, at the time of this research, the BOS on-line survey tool, which was the standard software platform used by the research University. Questionnaires, such as the ones used here, allow the participants to provide information which they feel is relevant, without the pressures of time or issues which were raised during the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pg. 49). The questions asked were designed to gather information that would provide contextual information which would be important in the analysis of their narratives but also provide information prior to the interview that could be used as part of the conversation, for example, their reasons for taking part in the study. A lot of the pre-planning for gathering the data was to ensure that sufficient information was gathered in the initial stages of the study to minimise the need to request further information at a later stage. This was to remove the risk to causing frustration for the participants and avoid the potential of them withdrawing from the study (Gul & Ali, 2010, pg. 230).

There was no limit on the amount of space allocated for the participants' responses and the questions are detailed in figure (4):

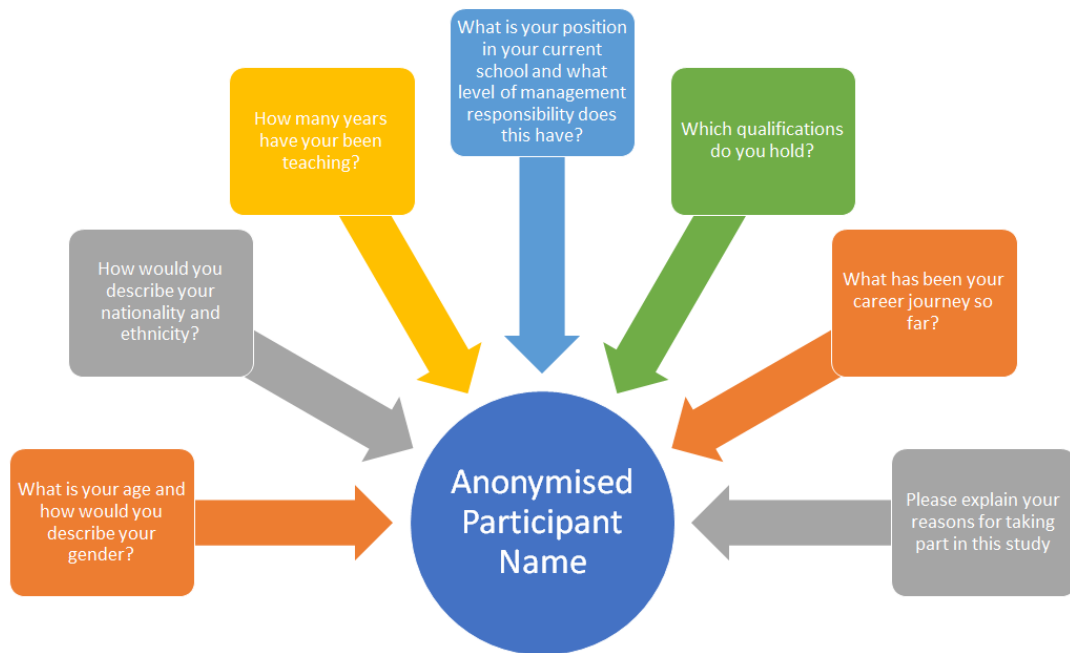


Figure (4): Demographic Questions for the Participants

The questions used in the post-interview questionnaire are detailed in figure (5):



Figure (5): Post-Interview Questions for the Participants

The use of the on-line questionnaire was extended to provide a method for reflection for the participants on their extended knowledge of their networks, gained through the experience of the research. The post-interview questionnaire was designed to allow for the participants to include anything they felt was relevant, that may have not been included in the interview, and to reflect on the impact of their experience of mapping on their understanding of their network. These questions detailed in figure (5), like to ones in the pre-interview questionnaire in figure (4), were not limited in the space for reply to allow for the participants to feel that they could express their response fully.

Across the research design, the methods I chose were selected to generate stories and narratives of the participants' lived experiences. Therefore, the use of the on-line questionnaire was also an extension of this process, and I adopted an open approach to the style of questions asked (Gray, 2014, pg. 361). The responses to the open approach style of question meant that there was no definitive answer and the advantage of this for my study was the potential richness that could be added to the narrative (Gray, 2014, pg. 361). Robson and McCartan (2016, pg. 261) problematise the use of open questions in the generation of large amount of narrative due to the complexity and commitment required for the analysis. In fact, they say: 'The desire to use open-ended questions appears to be almost universal in novice researchers but is usually rapidly extinguished with experience' (ibid.). However, my use of the questionnaire is not for sampling or large-scale purposes (Gray, 2014, pg. 361) but as an additional supportive mechanism which functions as an alternative mode of collection around the same context of the interview.

From figures (4 & 5) the nature of the questions has been for the participants to use their own descriptions in response to the questions. Gray and McCartan (2016, pg. 258) suggest the need for the questions in the questionnaire should link to the overall need of the research questions. Whilst the questions could have been a combination of tick boxes and open text, the variety of possible responses needing to be pre-identified meant I felt that it would be simpler to allow the participants to respond in whatever way they felt the most comfortable. The use of pre-determined categories can be useful when standardised responses and analysis are required, however, this was not necessary for my purpose. The success of this approach, as Gray and McCartan (2016, pg. 259) point out, is that the participants are able to understand the intention of the questions and be able to answer them authentically and in a way which remains in line with the research. Indeed, in chapters 4 and 5, the analysis of the questionnaire responses along with the interview narratives demonstrate the different interpretations of the participants to the questions.

Capturing the authenticity of the participants through the research design and analysis was an area which was central in my approach throughout the study. In the next section I discuss the dilemmas I experienced in my goal of achieving this authenticity and how I honoured the participants' voice through the analysis in my study.

3.6 Authenticity and Participant Voice

In 3.4 I discussed my approaches to participant selection, I highlighted the advice from Silverman (2013, pg. 44) to consider not the sample size as much as how 'authenticity' of the participants' experiences can be captured. This was a dilemma I had throughout my study in how my research design would capture the authentic reflections of the

participants and how would I honour this in my analytical approach. Reason (1999, pg. 211) highlights a potential risk for research, which is based on participants' interpretations of their experiences, as one of the participants 'fooling themselves.' Robson and McCartan (2016, pg. 114) suggest that participants can provide over-simplified or entitled responses based on what they think is expected from them and Lewis, Ritchie, Ormston and Morrell (2014, pg. 357) advise that one way to manage these risks is through creating authenticity in the research process. In 3.5.1.1 I highlight the use of the conversational, semi-structured approach within my interview structure. This, combined with the mapping process laid out in 3.5.1.2, was designed to generate the informal conversations suggested by Eraut (2000, pg. 20). In addition to the design of the research methods to capture authenticity, DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006, pg. 316) suggest that gaining a rapport with participants is a crucial aspect of the interview process to generate lucid accounts of experiences. Therefore, using Barnes (1979, pg. 106) as a guide, I drew on my pre-existing knowledge in the context of providing a familiarity and collective understanding, that of the culture within schools, to create a trusting conversation with the participants about their experiences. It was important, however, that within the interviews I used my knowledge to create trust without allowing this to result in missing crucial information from the study or misleading the participants into disclosing more than they felt comfortable with (ibid., pg. 108). Therefore, when conducting the interview, it was imperative that I did not accept or agree with a collective understanding; that I did not startle through surprise at their responses; or dismiss a disclosure through ignoring but asked the participant to expand on their understanding or meaning. The purpose of these considerations during the interview was to enable both 'bonding and sharing'

whilst both the participant and I made sense of their experiences (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006, pg. 317).

Despite following the literature on the research design and interview techniques to capture authenticity without becoming ethically problematic, there remained the question: 'how can I know that my research design is creating the correct environment for authentic discussion and divulgence of information?' DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006, pg. 317) suggest that capturing the narratives of the participants in their 'own words' is a goal within the interview process. In 3.2.2 my discussion around 'Critical Subjectivity', it was important that through my position as a practitioner-researcher I cycled through the ways of knowing and paid critical attention to the 'self-reflexive' position (Reason, 1994, pg. 334) of my participants. The purpose of this process was to recognise the possibility of prejudiced judgements around whether I considered their narratives to be honest accounts of their experiences. Rowan (1981, pg. 103) suggests that researchers ask themselves throughout the interview and during the process of analysis what evidence of authenticity is present within the participants' responses. Following this advice, I recorded in my field notes particular phrases the participants used that led me to consider their account genuinely reflective of their situations and experiences. This was important because as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, pg. 553) suggest 'the researcher must ensure that [the values] of the participants are featured in the narratives that have been constructed.' Therefore, by recognising these phrases the participants used, I would be able to draw on these during the analysis to demonstrate why I considered the interview narratives to be honest accounts. Therefore, I now explore my approach to analysis and explore how my approach I was able to retain a sense of relatable stories through, what Riessman

(2008, pg. 12), describes as ‘honouring individual intention and agency’ of the participants, whilst also addressing the research questions in my study.

3.7 Approach to Analysis

In the study I use a combined approach of narrative and thematic analyses, where the focus is to retain the meanings and intentions from the stories told by the participants. The decision to use a combined approach to analysis was to explore the themes from the research questions, whilst maintaining the authenticity of the participants’ experiences through their narratives. Therefore, this next section explains my rationale and approach to analysis and concludes with a discussion around the rigour and trustworthiness of the findings.

3.7.1 Thematic Narrative Analysis

When considering how I would approach the analysis in my study, I needed to choose a method which would reflect the interpretative, qualitative nature of my study. Braun and Clarke (2006, pg. 78) suggest that Thematic Analysis is a flexible method which can ‘provide a rich and detailed account of the data.’ A thematic approach, according to Hayes (1997, pg. 112), would allow me to apply the theoretical framework from the literature, alongside the generation of emerging themes that have resonance with the narratives of the participants. I considered it be important that my analysis of the data would allow me to be reflexive towards the narratives and stories generated through the research process in my study. This was because, as discussed in 3.6, the authenticity of my participants experiences needed to remain visible in my findings. This was emphasised by Pinnegar and Daynes (2007, pg. 4), when they tell us that

‘qualitative researchers are interested not in prediction and control but in understanding’. My study is concerned with understanding the lived experiences of the participants through the exploration of their relationships, and therefore, my approach to analysis needed to reflect that I was not using my study to ‘prove’ a phenomenon but to understand the experiences of the participants.

In 3.5.1, I explained how through a combination of semi-structured interviewing and a mapping approach, my intention was to construct an authentic discussion with the participants. This would mean the stories told by my participants could hold a considerable amount of emotional attachment and I was becoming wary about, what Punch describes as, ‘decontextualising the data’ through breaking the data into small pieces (2009, pg. 190). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, pg. 553) explain that narrative analysis can break with ‘the strictures of coding and the risk of disembodied text that can too easily result from coding and retrieval exercises.’ They suggest that narrative analysis can provide, among other things, ‘a realism, authenticity...personality, emotions, views and values’ (pg. 553) to the research. These elements were attractive to me as they were aligned with my desire to retain a sense of the participants in the study and across the data. However, the problem here was I had not designed a narrative inquiry and therefore, I was not sure how I could position my study in such a way to accommodate narrative analysis (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007, pg. 5).

However, Silverman (2013, pg. 188) suggests that by treating interview responses as ‘cultural stories’ this lends itself to a narrative analysis. A key component for narrative analysis is that the data is kept ‘intact’ rather than being ‘fractured’ by, for example a

thematic analysis, where the data is cut across different analytical themes (Braun and Clarke, 2013, pg. 197). Braun and Clarke (2013) describe narrative analysis as a 'family of qualitative methods for making sense of 'storied' data' (pg. 197). I had initially used AtlasTi and NVivo, which are computer aided programmes used in the analysis of qualitative data. However, I felt lost and detached from the data, yet I was also struggling to resolve the dilemma around reconciling the subjective, interpretive, and scientific elements in my research (Lonkila, 1995, pg.46). Riessman (2008, pg. 12) suggests a narrative study relies on the accounts from the participants being 'preserved' rather than as 'fragments'. Yet my dilemma was I had specific themes, which were either detailed in the research questions or would emerge within and across the narratives of the participants. Therefore, how could I retain the narrative whilst still analysing against the themes? For Riessman (2008, pg. 12) the distilling of long accounts into coding units can result in the accounts being taken out of context, which was the fear I had experienced in my analysis. As Riessman (2008) says 'honouring individual agency and intention is difficult when cases are pooled to make general statements' (pg. 12). However, she does contest that 'category-centred models of research' can be combined with close analysis of individual cases (Riessman, 2008, pg. 54). Shukia, Wilson and Broddy (2014, pg. 2) had used both thematic and narrative analyses in their study on 'children's spatialities' to gain a more holistic understanding of their embodiments, emotions, and agency. They used this approach to combine the 'broad overview' that comes from a thematic approach, with the 'extended focus on particularities' that narrative approaches allow. Riessman (2008, pg. 53) describes this as Thematic Narrative Analysis, where there is narrative analysis

across the stories captured during the interview process which develop alongside a themed categorisation to allow a magnified insight into specific areas of commonality.

One of my intentions for the analysis of the data was to gather a 'feeling' for the context and emotionality of the participants and, according to Braun and Clarke (2013, pg. 198), narrative analysis is committed to an approach which captures the construction of knowledge and reality. Grbich (2013, pg. 221) suggests a 'sociocultural' approach to narrative analysis allows a visibility as people make sense of their everyday lives because they connect 'past-present-future' events. As narrative analysis is not constrained by a particular theoretical position, but a discovery of truth through methodological approaches, it allows for a reveal of the combined emotional and contextual quality of lives. It can help provide an insight into the values of experiences and understand both the individual and socio-cultural positions of the participants (Braun and Clarke, 2013, pg. 198). Therefore, my use of the thematic narrative analysis was a way of bringing the participants to life across their stories as they were presented to me.

To conduct a narrative analysis, Braun and Clarke (2013, pg. 197) explain there is no method, in fact, Riessman (2008, pg. 53) states that 'students looking for a set of rules will be disappointed'. Rather, it is a 'craft' which comes from understanding the human condition and experiences and develops through extensive exposure to critical reading of examples of narrative studies (Braun and Clarke, 2013, pg. 197). Indeed Coffey, Holbrook and Atkinson (1996, 7.7) have questioned the need for the coding of text and argued of the 'danger of seeing coding data segments as an analytic strategy in its own right' and that this 'is by no means that only way of managing and

manipulating data'. During the initial stages of the analysis, I was scrabbling for a resolution across the subjective and the scientific, as well as feeling lost within the data through my use of the computer-aided software. Even though I was now closer to the data, through my repeated familiarisations with it, as I discussed previously in this section, I still had nagging doubts over my approach. Riessman (2008, pg. 73) explains that novice researchers can often fall into a thematic approach when handling narrative data as it appears 'intuitive and straightforward', yet it is 'a methodical and painstaking' process. I considered myself to be falling into, what Attride-Stirling (2001, pg. 386) describes for social science researchers, being 'left stranded when it comes to analysis'. How could I demonstrate rigour in my approach to analysis? How could I show trustworthiness in my analysis and findings?

To resolve these issues, I needed to develop a strategy of handling the data in such a way as to demonstrate a methodical approach. Having established that I wanted to retain the narrative aspect of the interviews and view them as 'cultural stories' (Silverman, 2013, pg. 88) I still needed to answer the research questions. Therefore, I would need to isolate extracts from the participants' narratives to demonstrate their meanings and experiences whilst keeping in mind the necessity for authenticity. To do this, I approached the narratives of the participants from the perspective that 'they can give a uniquely rich and subtle understanding of life situations' (Punch, 2009, pg. 191). This meant that I needed to pay particular attention to their meanings and intentions when categorising their narratives into the four broad themes of the research questions. However, I needed to have an analytical method in the way I approached the data. Therefore, I combined the steps from Braun and Clark (2006,

pg. 87) around Thematic Analysis and the analytical activities when approaching narrative texts from Gibbs (2015, pg. 63) to give myself an approach I could use.

I followed broadly the format of thematic handling as provided by the seminal work of Braun and Clarke (2006) whilst maintaining a close eye on both my subjectivity in interpretation and that of the participants.

3.7.2 The Thematic Process

I will now present each of the stages in turn and discuss how I used the approach in line with the narrative considerations explored in the previous section.

Familiarisation with the Data

Across the data analysis, on the advice of LeCompte & Preissle (2008, pg. 235), the data analysis began in tandem with the data generation and continued throughout the study. I had remained close the data throughout the study, both during and after the period of data collection. Gibbs (2015, pg. 143) suggests that novice researchers, like myself, can end up with surface reading of the interview transcripts and therefore I immersed myself in the data as much as possible, either through listening to the interviews when in the car or whilst gardening, and by reading and re-reading the transcripts. This strategy resulted in a manual handling of the data, through handwritten notes, highlighters, and 'coloured inks and the like' (Coffey, Holbrook and Atkinson, 1996, 7.2). This constant familiarisation with the narratives of the participants resulted in a two-layered exposure of their stories: the first, a categorisation with my four research questions, and the second a recognition of the experiences across the participants. I drew from the deductive-inductive process, as

described by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), as a hybrid approach in thematic analysis. Therefore, I deductively applied the framework from my literature, whilst inductively bringing out the meanings and nuances from the narratives. However, rather than considering my approach to analysis as fracturing the data into codes to later bring back together into themes, my approach began with the narrative as a whole and branched out into layers of categories and groupings. The intention of this was to combine the literature and the data in the analysis to ensure rigour in the approach and trustworthiness across the interpretations.

Initially, the analysis was in the form of field notes and diaries where I kept records and referred to events, such as the location of the interview or how relaxed over the length of time for the interview the participants appeared. In addition to this, the literature and structure of the four research questions and the framework established from the literature, this meant that there was already a conceptual framework in place for the analysis of the data. Braun and Clarke (2013, pg. 206) identify the differences between selective and complete approaches to handling the data; where selective is the search for a specific phenomenon or a group of specific phenomena and complete coding indicates that 'anything and everything' is identified which is relevant to the research question. They expand on this using the terms data-derived and researcher-derived codes (Braun and Clarke, 2013, pg. 207), where data-derived indicates codes which directly mirror the language of the participants and researcher-derived means that the codes identify implicit meaning within the data that are linked to the conceptual framework. As I already had a broad conceptual framework which was based across the four research questions, the analysis of the data led to identifying where different statements from the participants connected into various categories.

As I have discussed in the previous section, there was a period throughout the data collection and during the analysis of reading and re-reading, note taking within and across interviews. These were leading to an identification of common threads in the conversation which, although fitted into the research questions, also raised other possibilities of themes such as impact of sharing or identity. In addition to the reading of the transcripts, there was also repeated listening to the audio. This allowed for additional checking that the transcripts were accurate and any missing words in the original were revisited to ensure accuracy. The listening to the audio was also important as the nuances of how statements were said, or hesitations and pauses also influenced my interpretations of the data, especially around staying connected with the narrative when attempting to 'paint the picture' of the participants that I alluded to earlier.

Identification of Themes in the Data

The presence of the conceptual framework across the research questions meant that the analysis during the familiarisation process was concentrated towards identifying examples in the data which mirrored the literature. As the transcripts and audio were repeatedly revisited and cross-referenced, the initial categories were very much researcher-derived codes as they were interpretative across the framework. The coding was conducted as complete coding across the entire transcripts and each piece of data was given due attention to meaning. Where there was evidence of narratives which were difficult to identify within the framework, a data derived code was established which then led to revisiting across the transcripts again to find further

examples and this was placed in a separate group called 'surprising'. Therefore, the process was an 'organic and evolving one' (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pg. 211).

Searching for Themes

The first two stages of familiarisation and initial coding in the thematic process enabled a review of the data. In the main this has been a 'mining' exercise to identify examples from the data which mirror the literature. This is because the four research questions were directed towards a particular area for analysis:

1. Who do middle leaders include in their professional networks and why?
SOCIAL NETWORK
2. In what ways do middle leaders use their network contacts and what is the nature of the exchanges between them? CAPITAL
3. How do the interaction with the network influence middle leaders' sense of control and efficacy in their roles? AGENCY
4. To what extent does the contribution that their networks make affect their motivation and commitment within the workplace? RESILIENCE

Using the hybrid framework from Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006, pg. 86) there was fluctuation between applying the framework from the literature and identifying experiences which resonated with those. Clandinin and Connelly (2000, pg. 131) talk about 'narratively coding' texts, so that the stories can 'interweave and interconnect' whilst also identifying gaps and silences to show where there are 'tensions' and 'discontinuities' across the participants. Across the four research questions, and therefore the four areas of analysis, there is an accumulative assumption that each area is leading into another. As my study is looking at the lived experiences of the

participants, then in the analysis there is not only identifying and answering each research question in turn, but also in understanding the flow of the experiences across all the questions. Therefore, as the coding was categorised and further sub-categorised against the framework, a commonality across the participants' responses was identified and collectively grouped in a grounded theme.

Reviewing Themes

The reviewing of the themes was focused on the 'grounded' codes, that is a commonality across the narratives outside of the conceptual framework used to analyse the data against each research question. Identifying these patterns in the data and then further reviewing the themes means that within the data there is both a hierarchical and lateral structure, something which Braun and Clarke (2013, pg. 231) advise against unless it the best way to present the data. A hierarchical structure is one where the themes occur in levels where there is a distribution of an overarching theme, which organises the structure of analysis and then has a secondary layer of themes associated with it, and lower levels of sub-themes. A lateral structure is one that is distributed across several themes, without a hierarchical structure. By reviewing the themes and revisiting the transcripts and audio again, with a 'new set of eyes and ears', it meant that the coding process was thorough and inclusive. Whilst the study is interpretative, and the influence of my own subjectivity and bias has been extensively discussed throughout the thesis, this area of analysis is important to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. This cycle of reviewing the themes and continually redefining the codes to reduce the number of overall codes, ensures the themes to be 'coherent, consistent and distinctive' (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pg. 287).

Participants Narratives and Case Comparison

The narratives of each of the participants was constructed around the interview data and responses to the questionnaire. This was done in the order the interviews took place so that the 'interconnection and interweaving' from Clandinin and Connelly (2000, pg. 131) was present in the narratives to show where there was commonality across their experiences. Riessman (2008, pg. 50) suggests that as a narrative analyst I would be 'critically shaping the stories the participants chose to tell' and this was present from their biographical introduction, the main narratives which were constructed from their main themes in the interview and finishing with a reflective section on the impact the research process had on them.

To answer the four research questions, the constructed narratives were approached from the perspective of identifying areas of commonality and areas of contrast. This approach, suggested by Gibbs (2015, pg. 81), was used to enable an understanding of the participants' experiences from the perspective of the individual research questions but to also provide a combined narrative across all the research questions so that the findings in my study provided a visibility of what it looks like to be a middle leader in schools.

3.8 Rigour and Trustworthiness

To conclude this chapter on methodology and methods, I will evaluate the rigour and trustworthiness around the data and findings in my study. Dahler-Larson (2018, pg. 881) suggests a dilemma in qualitative research around the 'trustworthiness' of data is the lack of objectivity that is often present in quantitative research (ibid.). In 3.2.1.2, I discuss the 'blurring' of the ontological and epistemological divide in interpretivist

studies (Waring, 2012, pg. 18), where he raises the issue of 'what can be known is inextricably linked with the interaction between a particular (researcher) and a particular (participant)' (ibid.). As a Chemist, I find this 'blurring' difficult to reconcile when considering the objectiveness required in experimental research. I am very experienced in scientific method and the dependability of variables and interventions, where reliability, that is repeatability, is a crucial aspect of the findings. Here the ontological and epistemological distinctions are clear. However, LeCompte & Preissle (2008, pg. 332) emphasise that within qualitative research, reliability in its truest sense is an impossibility and indeed a hindrance to the nature of qualitative studies exploring the social world. Ormston et al. (2014, pg. 23) advise that, as a qualitative researcher, I should endeavour to attain rigour of approach across all the aspects of my study rather than aiming for absolute objectivity. Combining these perspectives and considering myself as a qualitative social science researcher, I will discuss the rigour of my approach and the trustworthiness of my data and findings.

Rigour, for Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006, pg. 82), demonstrates 'integrity and competence within a study'. They suggest in interpretative study this can be achieved through a balance across the subjective interpretations of the participants and the researcher. In 3.2.2 I discuss my philosophical position of 'Critical Subjectivity' as a way to demonstrate the rigour in my approach through maintaining a reflexive position, especially when considering my interpretations of the participants' experiences. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (ibid.) advise the interpretative position of the participants is visible through illustrative findings using 'quotations' from the narrative data. In 3.6 I discussed my approach to capturing the voice of participants, using semi-structured interviews alongside the network mapping process to aid an authentic

discussion. The analysis of my data was constructed around the need to maintain the visibility of my participants interpretations, which Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006, pg. 82) suggest is an important aspect of rigour within this type of study. The decision to use a 'thematic narrative' approach I discuss in 3.7.1, where I highlight the use of 'narrative analysis' to capture the authentic voices combined with the methodological process of 'thematic analysis' by paying attention to the research questions specifically. The rigour, as I discussed in 3.7.2 around my thematic process, was strengthened by adopting the hybrid deductive-inductive approach suggested by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006, pg. 83), to ensure I captured as much of the interpretations of the participants as possible.

Nowell et al. (2017, pg. 4) suggest that a thematic process to analysis also demonstrates 'trustworthiness' in the processing of the data in the production of the findings. Through a methodological approach, discussed in 3.7.2, which moves back and forth between the analytical steps means the 'iterative and reflexive process' (ibid.) enables a visibility of the understandings applied to the participants' experiences (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, pg. 4). In 3.7.1, I explained my rationale for combining thematic analysis with narrative analysis, which was to maintain a visibility of my participants and to present a sense of relatable stories in my study. The descriptions in the narratives can provide a sense of transferability of the findings as they can provide an accessibility which can be applied across settings (Nowell et al., 2017, pg. 3). These narratives are now presented in chapter 4, where data from each participant is used and presented with 'thick and rich description' of their experiences and interpretations of their networks.

4. Chapter 4 Exploring the Narratives

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the narratives from each of the participants in my study. In 3.7 I explained the importance of retaining the visibility of the participants' narratives throughout the analysis to 'honour (their) individual agency and intention' (Riessman, 2008, pg. 12). Combining the various sources of data means that I as the researcher, does what Riessman (2008) describes as, 'critically shape(ing) the stories the participants choose to tell.' (pg. 50). Therefore, the narratives that I present here are the stories of each participant, constructed from the interview data and the questionnaire responses, interspersed with my own field notes and reflections from the interviews.

The participants are presented in the order each interview took place. This is to reflect the inductive, interpretative process where my observations and field notes are increasingly concerned with the comparisons and contrasts of the experiences from the participants. Within the narratives, key themes from the literature are used to highlight where there is resonance in the framework in chapter 2, and this exploration lends itself to a combined narration in chapter 5, which deductively addresses the four themes across the research questions in my study.

The stories of the participants were constructed around when they occurred, chronologically, in the interview. This is to understand the order in which they included different groups of people and to recognise the varying importance the participants attach to their network members (Marin, 2004, pg. 298). As I discussed in

3.3, the participants were not asked to prepare their networks in advance of the interview. This was to enable the interview to capture the real-time creation of the participants' networks. Therefore, the structure of the stories reflects the order of the various priorities that the participants attach to the people in their network, and these are presented as the key themes in the individual narratives.

The first participant I present is Anna and her narrative begins with a description of her role, school context, and recruitment onto the study. This introduction to Anna is constructed from the responses to the first on-line questionnaire, combined with responses from the interview, my own field notes, and observations. In 3.4 I discussed the importance of including this information to demonstrate the range of voices in the study and this short biography and background information sets the scene for the interpretative analysis and discussion which follows. Anna's narrative is concluded with her reflections of the interview and mapping process. Whilst some of the responses to this questionnaire are used in the construction of the narrative, this concluding discussion provides an important understanding concerning what impact the research process has had on each of the participants. This structure is repeated for each of the participants in turn.

4.2 Anna – Head of Art (Departmental Middle Leadership)

When we met Anna had been teaching for 20 years and worked full-time at a large secondary school that is part of a Multi-Academy Trust. Anna described her role as joint lead within the Visual Arts department, which consisted of a combination of seven teachers and technicians. Her role as middle leader meant she was responsible for managing the curriculum, budget management, and all areas of the day-to-day

running of the department. She was also a Lead Practitioner, which meant she had responsibility across the school, working on development programmes for teaching and learning, and was keen to move into Senior Leadership. Anna had been approached to take part in the study as she was interested in research and whilst not part of my own network, she was a participant with whom I had a commonality as we both worked for the same Trust.

Anna's narrative follows the order in which Anna structured her network to allow for an understanding of the level of importance her relationships play in her priorities. The structure follows this distribution, and the narrative is organised around these key themes:

Husband and Close Friend Relationships

She selected first her husband and friends who were ex-colleagues that she had remained close to. She used the phrases "*a daily dumping ground*" and "*go to's*" in terms of her work-related conversations with them. She had a great deal of trust within these relationships and this part of her network were the people she could off-load to, without fear of judgement, and where she would "*go to talk something through*". Anna chose her support network first and she emphasised that these relationships were also social, and their conversations would "*not just be about school*." This meant their relationships were reciprocal, which Portes (1998) (2.3.3) described as one of the bonds within social groups, as they could each call on the other when needed and they provided support in their personal as well as professional lives.

Department Relationships

Anne described her department as her *“immediate working group”* and had arranged her team in a circle because she considered, *“they’re all kind of interwoven”*, because there was no one specific person she felt she would go to, but each member of the team was valued for their knowledge and expertise. Anna identified her whole department collectively as having significant importance for her, and the way she described the ‘interwoven’ nature of their relationships indicated that there was a reciprocity throughout the team.

Anna said within the department there is a lot of knowledge exchange *“we talk a lot about good practice and how we can get things better.”* This idea of a continual conversation in the discussions, such as curriculum planning within her department were *“fluid and natural”* and whilst there would be key objectives set out at the start of the year, there was a constant discussion around delivery:

“I think it’s just, it’s the way we work as a team. We always, every day, are sounding things out, giving feedback, giving some suggestions – it’s just the way most of the conversations go.”

There was a sense of reciprocity within the department relationships, but the dependence of action and influence embedded within these appeared to be directed at a professional level rather than a personal one. Through Anna’s reflections on the interactions within the department, she identified a downside to the constant focus on department-based issues in the daily conversations:

“It kind of made me realise that even in our social times, which aren’t really social times in school, the breaks and the lunches, we’re always talking about work mostly.”

Anna described a work environment that was frantic and dynamic, and she had become aware of a potential negative side of that, which was the lack of time to develop deeper relationships with colleagues. This has resonance for my findings concerning the importance of social activities to develop positive relationships with the colleagues that we work with.

Anna also felt the rapid nature of the day within the department left her little time as a middle leader to do much strategic planning. Even though the continual flow of discussion, around things like the curriculum, connects with the position of Priestley, Biesta & Robinson (2016) (2.4.3) where teacher agency emerges when there is access to relational resources and constructive engagement with curriculum policy, for example. The need for resolution of issues with immediate solutions meant there was little time for Anna to allocate for reflection and action on wider issues.

Senior Leadership Relationships

The conversation with Anna around the close friends, and department relationships had elicited a great deal of narrative around the context and impact of informal relationships. These conversations were random and often without agenda.

I asked Anna to describe how her relationships differed with the senior leadership team:

“I’m on a very steep learning curve during these conversations because these are much more senior colleagues, so I sometimes doubt whether I offer very much”

Anna’s description of how she viewed herself within the relationships with senior leaders provided an insight: *“I feel I’m out of my comfort zone and I realise it’s good to stretch myself”* of how she viewed these relationships as ways of learning which could move her career on. These new relationships appear to offer additional social as well as cultural capitals to her. Portes (1998) (2.3.3) suggests that social capital is an ability to secure benefits through membership within a social structure. Anna described this as she explained how she viewed these conversations, and accessing the experience of the senior team, as a way for thinking about her future career *“to get my head around, you know, what the next stage would be I suppose.”*

Anna had described her conversations within the department as *“fluid and natural”* and this contrasted with those with the senior team: *“There is a fixed arrangement here and we’ll make an arrangement.”* The way she managed the time demands and the need for conversation with the senior leaders was different than with her department. Breiger (1988) (2.2.2) suggests relationships can be by symmetric or asymmetric based on the balance of power and friendship and these are emphasised in the symmetric nature of the conversations within the department, but the contrasting asymmetric and regimented nature of discussions with senior colleagues.

Social Impacts through School

Anna explained she had recently been on a school trip with a member of her department and had been surprised about her lack of knowledge about their personal

life. She referred to her comments about the lack of social discussion within her department and the way she felt this could develop the relationships across the team: *“it would be nice to kind of have that time to kind of speak about other things, it would probably add a better dimension to the team or to the relationships”*. She considered the barriers for more social conversations were the lack of opportunities and time within the working day.

However, she had recently discovered that she shared a hobby with a member of the senior team, which she hoped would help to strengthen their relationship. This common interest had a positive influence on her *“...it gives us something else to talk about.”* Anna viewed the potential for this relationship to help develop her career as she found that having this common of interest was a powerful attribute:

“It kind of breaks down those professional barriers...it kind of breaks the ice a little bit I suppose and makes you feel – it’s a bit more personal which makes it easier I think.”

Borgatti and Ofem (2015) (2.2.2) discuss the increased likelihood of attachment between members when they have multiple connections between them. This additional layer of connection for Anna is reflected in her social capital because, as Bourdieu (1986) (2.3.3) explains, social capital is accessed through mutual recognition and acquaintance.

Family Balance

Anna took some time to quietly evaluate her map and wanted to add another group: *“There’s a little group of people”*, that of her children. She was thinking quite

deeply at this point about how her work was impacting on her relationships with her children and had become distracted. I asked about how she felt work was influencing home:

“I suppose, when I’m at home and I’m kind of feeling a bit frustrated – I try not to. He’s [refers to husband] really good at giving really good practical advice.”

She explained that she tried not to take work home and used the journey to *“kind of sift it all out”* so when she did get home, she was present for her family. But on the occasions where that had not been possible, her husband was *“just that one person, he will sort that.”*

When I asked what types of issues she might sift through on her journey: *“...you know I’ve had a terrible lesson, or I’ve had a bit of bad feedback.”* Anna returned to her map and came back into the department and moved away from family:

“I will take it to these guys [refers to department as a whole] and, it’s really non-judgemental and they’ll remind me of what’s – the good things that go on and put it into perspective.”

In my field notes I had marked this section of the interview as a turning point. I had felt the interview had been conversational, and Anna had been talking honestly about her network and her relationships. However, there was a difference in her openness in this discussion which was subtly different to what had gone on before.

Motivations and Future Career

I asked Anna what kept her motivated in her role and the department was a significant source of this: *“It’s constantly evolving with new ideas and never seems to dry up, we never seem to dry up.”* The dynamic nature of the role and within teaching she found motivating and the evolution of *“new ideas”* was sustaining her in her work. However, her new motivation was around career progression. She felt she was *“kind of pottering a bit”* in her role as middle leader but, through her relationships with the Senior Team, she hoped she would be able to move into senior leadership:

“I’ve got the chance to learn something completely new and quite big...so this is quite motivating, even though I find it a bit scary at times, I do quite enjoy working at that slightly different level.”

Anna explained she had approached the senior team by volunteering for activities and applying for roles to show her enthusiasm for progression:

“I think by me kind of putting myself out there and applying for various things and not always being successful in getting them; however, it’s the conversations that have come afterwards [which are important]”

Anna is displaying a great deal of agency through driving forward her intentions. Despite having multiple setbacks, she remained committed to her desire for progression and adapted by seeking out alternative ways to approach this with the senior team. This commitment, despite the setbacks, is mirrored in the literature on resilience by Brunetti (2006) (2.6.1) as she is demonstrating her ability to ‘stay the course’. Anna was demonstrating a long-term commitment to her network; this

investment was part of her focus on her career and because she valued her relationships: *"I think I like to kind of establish [a] kind of working relationships that are quite solid and not just kind of fickle."*

As the interview was ending, Anna was asked whether there was anything that had not been captured through the interview:

"I think it's made me question one or two sorts of things about the balance that I have and also just the opening up a little bit more in terms of professional and friendship and you know, it's made me – a bit of food for thought I suppose."

Post-Interview Reflections

Anna had been quite reflective throughout the interview. She had considered, often deeply, the role her network played in her working life. This was especially apparent when she raised the impact her work had on her family. She reflected that the process of mapping and discussing her network had given her *"food for thought"* and *"...a real chance to stop and think..."* about her wider relationships which had been *"...refreshing..."* However, one of the barriers for her asking for help was to not be a *"burden"* because other people also had busy working environments to manage. Therefore, she felt this was an area that she needed to develop more. She had frequently mentioned how the process of the building the map made her consider the nature of the relationships in ways she had not before. This was reiterated in her responses to the questionnaire as the process had *"...helped me to see a little more clearly where I fit..."* Taking part in the research appeared to be an important process for Anna as she felt the challenge for her now was *"to change habits and*

approaches” to aid the development of supportive and “...*effective*...” relationships in the future.

4.3 Paul – Head of Music (Departmental Middle Leadership)

Paul described his role as Head of Music and worked in a secondary school within a large town. He explained he was the only teacher employed within the school exclusively to teach music and this meant he managed the department with teachers from across the school in other disciplines, for example in Performing Arts. He shared a teacher with a neighbouring school and a collection of external peripatetic music teachers, those who teacher in multiple schools for the delivery of music lessons. He had been in teaching for nine years and was the youngest of the participants. He also explained that he had recently reduced his working week to 0.8fte to manage his work-life balance with his young family. Paul had received an e-mail through the Alumni with information about the study and had made contact as he was interested in the areas of research, such as networks.

Following the structure, which I discussed at the start of Anna’s narrative analysis, the narrative presented here follows the order in which Paul structured his network and is organised around his key themes:

Close Colleagues

Paul chose a school colleague, who worked with his department, that he was closest to within the school. He described her as: “*she’s like my mum, my working mum.*” He explained they had done many music tours together and the relationship extended

outside of school. *"I trust her; I know, she knows my family. I can tell her anything; I can rant to her."* He explained that this was important him:

"She's got family, she puts the sort of 'work isn't as important as family' slant onto things because I'm definitely seeing that when I'm stressed out."

Paul's trust in this person was important to him as he felt he could rant about his work without the fear of recrimination. She also provided a perspective on the importance his family and personal life in comparison with his working commitments. He felt these relationships were the most significant when he found himself feeling stressed and overwhelmed with his role:

"She says 'Paul get a grip'... 'you're doing a fantastic job. Why are you stressing out about something like that when you are doing a good job?'"

Paul felt that these working relationships had an equality in their flow of information and support, which meant they had a strong bond between them of trust and reciprocity. Day and Gu (2014a) (2.6.2) say that relationships lie in the root of resilience and the narratives of Paul and Anna described how the perspectives of others helped them maintain their equilibrium.

Line Management and Senior Leader Relationships

Paul was in two minds whether to discuss these relationships as he said, *"it isn't positive."* I explained the purpose of the study was to look at the impact of professional relationships and networks from both good and bad perspectives and Paul could choose to withdraw any information he chose. I reminded him everything was confidential as all participants and their members were anonymised as part of the

analysis. He decided to continue because he felt this aspect of authority within the school and department were areas which had caused him issues. He began by explaining he did not feel that his performance management process was effective or functioned as an avenue for support: *"[I] think the way that an issue was dealt with put me off drastically going to (them) [for support]."*

Paul explained there had been conflict over priorities that were stretched across departments for student rehearsals for a major performance and that his line manager had not supported him. It had been recommended he go on a professional development course on Outstanding Leadership and Management. Paul explained this experience, rather than feeling supported, left him feeling demonised and it had cemented distrust in his relationship with his line manager. Therefore, he viewed performance management now as a procedure to endure rather than a positive process. The recall of the experience affected Paul; he used the phrase *'what was your question again'*, when I asked him how the situation made him feel: *"It was just making me feel like I couldn't do my job"*. This indicated to me that the recall of the memory was powerful enough for him to lose his train of thought.

Paul described the conflict with the senior leader: *"They put me in for cover in pretty much every lesson; undermined me in every single circumstance."* Paul described a situation where he felt he was being undermined and intimidated. The use of the word *'cover'* describes the use of teachers' non-contact sessions on their timetable to cover other lessons for absent teachers. The protection of an individual teacher's non-contact time is political in that there is policy in place to prevent using teachers for cover on a regular basis. However, there is the potential for it to be abused and it

could be considered a form of bullying to erode an individual teacher's non-teaching sessions, which are protected for activities such as planning and assessment. Bandura (2001) (2.4.1) suggests that self-efficacy and agency are a series of beliefs for enacting change. From what Paul has described, his agency and self-efficacy were damaged by not only the lack of support from his line manager, but the subsequent forced enrolment onto a leadership course. Emirbayer & Mische (1998) (2.4.1) tell us that agency, rather than a distinct characteristic, is influenced by an interplay between an individual and the environmental structure, which in this case appeared to be a political one. Paul felt his relationship with the Head Teacher was important in resolving the conflict: *"he had us both in a meeting and just said 'this, it needs to stop' and it did."* Paul felt supported by the Head, but he used the term *'non-repairable'* to indicate the future relationship with the senior leader involved.

As a result: *"I just learnt that if that person isn't going to do anything about it and if you've already spoken to the person, you need to go higher to get something done."*

This process and the resulting outlook from Paul around how he can make judgement calls based on whether he needs to access support to resolve issues is indicative of the professional capital suggested by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) (2.3.4), which accumulates through experience.

Head Teacher Relationships

Paul felt supported by his Head Teacher because he thought they understood the demands of his role concerning extra-curricular activities and they were sympathetic around the difficulties of organising whole school events: *"...(they) come from a PE background; they know all the extra-curricular stuff, so I feel like (they) listen very*

well.” This is an interesting observation by Paul. He has connected with the idea that there is a joint understanding and recognition from his Head Teacher with himself on experiences and knowledge, which only comes from practical wisdom. This mutuality gives him access to the Head Teacher, which might not be prevalent from others. These considerations by Paul were also the result of the Head allowing him autonomy to create his own team of peripatetic teachers to deliver music lessons in school:

“I said, well why don’t we get private teachers in, and I’ll look who’s around in the area and sort of get the best team together that I can.”

As an existing teacher within the school, Paul was promoted into the role and this support was an important aspect for him in creating his authority as a young, new head of department. Knowing he would be listened to was important for Paul as he had to challenge some curriculum decisions: *“I went straight to the Head and spoke to (them) at length and just said ‘actually this is how I feel.’”* Paul explained he trusted the Head Teacher to listen, and this support allowed him to feel that he could have influence and control over the outcomes which would affect him.

Family Relationships

Paul explained he had, in the past, used home as a way of dealing with the frustrations from his day: *“When I got home from school, I would automatically launch into ‘oh this happened’.”* However, this had a negative effect on his home life because bringing the stress home meant he had no time to listen to his wife or for them to spend time together. When I asked how he had changed that, he replied:

"I've had an hour in the car to sort of unwind. I just sort of pick one thing if it's particularly really got on my nerves...I am a really rubbish listener and I've had to work very hard at listening to her, so I've got to actively got to go 'no, shut up.'"

Paul had alluded to the effects of the stress throughout the interview. Maslach (2003) (2.5) categorises the effects of workplace stress as emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishments and as a result Paul had considered leaving the profession. However, his wife had grounded him with *"you need to pay the bills."* Therefore, he decided to reduce his working hours, and this had made a significant impact on his outlook:

"I've gone down to 0.8. I've loved it. Weekends have felt endless. Sundays are not the Sundays that I used to know."

In 2.6.2 I explored the literature around relational resilience and the role relationships play in 'riding the storm' when faced with challenges. Both Paul and Anna had suggested in their interviews there was a need to manage the balance between work and home, to provide support to their families as well as their families supporting them.

Wider Support Networks

Paul mentioned 'mental health' as one of the benefits from his connections with friends who were also music teachers. He described the mental health support as *"just sort of offloading"* but it was also important to relate with people through their passion for music. This mutual interest is described as an indicator of a strong cohesion

factor in social network analysis by Coburn, Choi & Mata (2015) (2.2.2) and this connects with Coleman (1998) (2.3.3) who considers social capital as a 'resource for persons'. The resources translate to what Paul described as *"mental health"* and with the practical things, such as, instrument loan and repair, as well as support in organising concerts. Paul considered these relationships as balanced, which Breiger (1988) (2.2.2) describes as symmetric, in terms of the friendship and support between them.

Paul explained the departments connected around the Performing Arts all shared an office, and this had a positive impact on how they all work together because it helped their collaborative working, especially around joint events. Paul's ability to draw on *"their expertise"* was important, as was the 'light-heartedness' of the conversations. The sense of *"having a laugh"* was an important aspect of their relationship as it created a mutuality and connection, a sense of camaraderie, which he described as *"banter"*.

Paul used his network with other schools to be able to discuss things, such as curriculum and as the only music teacher he was not able to do this in school. He explained they shared resources and as a result the music curriculum looked very similar in the local schools.

"[Conversations are] always just curriculum...and just trying to cut down on workload basically to say 'well what have you done? Can I use it?' and we pretty much do the same lessons."

He also used Facebook groups to access resources and he observed that the sites were a place to “rant” and a place to “share information”. Paul said that he used the sites to find information, such as resources: *“I go onto the file section and see what resources I can nick.”* These groups and Paul’s relationship with other schools are suggestive of Communities of Practice (2.2.3) where people come together with a shared intention, such as collective learning or shared practice. Paul’s descriptions suggest he finds the sharing of resources, with the intention of reducing workload, an important aspect of these interactions.

Motivations and Future Career

Paul’s motivation was driven by his relationships with his students: *“It’s the 6th formers and the kids that I teach that I think keep me doing it, especially the tours.”* The sense of the importance of the students to Paul’s work was very evident throughout the interview. His passion for music and the opportunities for the students to experience things, like concerts and music tours, had contributed to the way he maintained his commitment through the period of conflict he discussed earlier in ‘Line Manager and Senior Leader Relationships’.

In addition to the students and the music events, Paul felt praise and recognition from the Head Teacher also played an important part in him remaining committed to his work. Within school Paul felt that:

“You don’t get much praise in school. The majority of the time it’s ‘what have you forgotten?’ ‘What have you not done?’ or ‘What have you done badly?’”

He admitted this was something which wore him down and this resonates with Maslach (2003) (2.5) where one of the effects of stress is emotional exhaustion. He felt his relationship with the Head Teacher was important as they appreciated the things, such as concerts, events, music tours on top of his teaching commitments: *“They’ve seen how much work I’ve done; they can see what I can do, and I think that sort of keeps me going.”*

Paul also felt that his motivation to stay in teaching was driven by his relationships with his close colleagues his *“working Mum”*: *“...she just pops in and says ‘hello’ or leaves chocolates – like just little things.”* The connection with people in school who Paul felt he could trust and that he had connections with outside of school at social events, who he felt were concerned about his well-being all played an important part of his perspective in managing the demands of his role as department lead.

Post-Interview Reflections

Across the responses from Paul in his post-interview questionnaire, he appeared to distinguish between the relationships he considered to be influential and those which he considered to be *“...jumping through hoops...”* I consider him to be referring specifically to his relationship with his line manager, which had caused him a considerable amount of distress and had resulted in him approaching these relationships with caution and distrust. Paul recognised he had a large network due to the nature of his relationships with others in the wider music community, however the mapping process highlighted he had a *“...small working circle...”* This was interesting because it had led Paul to consider whether he was making best use of the relationships in his network and he referred specifically to his line manager. He had

started to consider which relationships could be more “...influential and therefore the ones (he) needed to work on.” I did wonder if this inclusion in the questionnaire and the naming of the line manager specifically was to mitigate the disclosure of his conflicts during the interview. There was a suggestion by Gray (2014) (3.3.1.1) that participants were at risk of negative outcomes in the workplace through taking part in research. Although all the participants and their networks are anonymised, Silverman (2013, pg. 108) (3.3.1.1) suggests that it is not possible to predict every effect of the outcome of participation. Therefore, I hoped this had been an authentic reflection for Paul for the future and not the result of any anxiety or distress the interview held for him.

4.4 Peter – Head of Year (Pastoral Middle Leadership)

The next interview was with Peter, who had been in teaching at the time of our meeting for just 7 years despite being one of the older participants in my study. He had moved into teaching after retiring from his previous career, where he considered that he had a substantial amount of experience which contributed to his work in teaching. Peter worked in a secondary school, like Paul’s, which was the main education provider in a large town within the geographical research area. Peter was the only Head of Year in the study, and this meant that instead of being a curricula lead, his middle leadership role was focused on the pastoral aspects of school management. Peter had received the information about the study from a member of my network who had forwarded the details to him. He was keen to be involved as he was interested in career and teacher development research.

The structure of Peter's narrative follows the order in which he designed his network, and this is presented around his key themes:

School Leaders & Colleagues

Peter explained that due to his role as a pastoral lead, his working day revolved around the needs of students and therefore, he would only be in his curriculum department for meetings or teaching. This was something which had an impact on his support network:

"Most of my support network tends to be around the pastoral side rather than the science side because of that. So, it does have the effect of, how shall I say, skewing the way you think about work."

Peter's role as pastoral lead meant his conversations were all focused on: *"pastoral issues; safeguarding issues and discipline issues and also lack of achievement."* His working day was structured around meetings which fit around his teaching commitments, but he also described the *"informal meetings that happen during the day when you bump into people who say, 'can you do this for me?'"* This gave Peter a visibility across the school and a wide range of people who he was in contact with daily. His conversations were dominated by his role as a pastoral lead and with colleagues bringing issues to him to resolve and if he needed support, he would approach the Senior Team who were responsible for safeguarding. The sense from Peter was that throughout his working day, his role and his connections were focused on a formal level and the conversations were, as he explained them, all work-related.

Teachers from Other Schools

Outside of school, Peter had a wide and varied network as he was part of several separate groups, involved with many collaborative projects around his subject discipline, and took part in a range of sporting activities. However, he would talk only about teaching related subjects with other people who were also teachers. His commute to work involved sitting with other teachers from neighbouring schools, *"...we sit down and have a bit of a natter about what goes on between the schools."* These conversations would revolve around marking policies and comparisons across schools. Peter described this as: *"...the sort of general chit-chat that you get."*

As Peter continued to build of picture of what his network looked like outside of school and the impact it had, a *"natter"* about teaching was something he did on a regular basis: *"... a good friend of mine, we go to the pub and we again chat about stuff like that as well...like the 'Silent Starters' and stuff that they do."* Paul described the sharing of resources, practice and policies as a useful feature of his network:

"You get steam off your chest don't you, a lot of it and you also occasionally pick up good practice: we do this, we do that, we do the other, and then you tend to bring that back into school as well."

Whilst I am not suggesting that Peter felt controlled in his workplace, there is a suggestion in 2.3.3 that one of the downsides around the social group-social capital dynamic is that of conformity, which is described by Field (2004) as the 'dark side' of social capital. Therefore, this raised the question as to whether Peter viewed his

association with groups outside of the workplace as a place where he could talk more freely and thereby “*let off steam*” in a way that he found uncomfortable at work.

Forums and Social Media Platforms

Peter introduced a platform he used that was part of the school network: “*We’ve got something called Teams – have you ever heard of it?*” In the current context of the global pandemic and the resulting change in culture around home working and the use of technology, this might appear an unusual question. However, as the interview took place before the COVID lockdowns, the use of Teams was still relatively new within schools. Peter found this platform useful as the groups were able to share information:

“You pick up some quite good ideas...I don’t tend to sit at home and do that sort of stuff because I’m probably busy doing my planning and my marking because I don’t do it at school.”

I asked if the forums gave a sense of the atmosphere within the school:

“It doesn’t really give you that because all of the Senior Management Team are on that so things like that wouldn’t get discussed on there because people aren’t daft. So that doesn’t happen.”

Although I had raised the observation about the possibility of social control within the workplace earlier in my interpretations of Peter’s narrative, I would not disagree with his sentiment here. Although Day and Gu (2010) (2.6.2) talk about the school leaders as the ‘creators and guardians’ of the workplace culture, there may be a sense of openness with the school culture which would not extend to openly expressing

dissatisfaction on a school-based forum. From the way Peter had described his network so far, he had distinguished clearly between the formality of his workplace relationships and those where there can be an informality that allows him to talk more freely. He would trust his workplace colleagues for support based on their expertise and experience, however, it was the members of his network outside of workplace where he suggested he could be less guarded.

Peter also used Facebook, which is a social networking site, and he was a member of several groups similar in nature to the ones used by Paul. Like Paul, Peter used the groups for information, especially relating to his work as pastoral lead, however he would rarely post on them, especially anything which could be considered controversial for similar reasons to the one he had given about the forums on the Teams platform. In the context of Peter's narrative here the use of Teams and Facebook as a way of gathering information reflects the way in which he describes much of his network, that of extracting knowledge through his interactions.

Resilience

Peter shared an office with other pastoral leads in school and this provided an opportunity to discuss work on a regular basis:

"The ones we have the whinges and the moans and the resilience with, is colleagues who are doing the same job to be honest."

Peter used the word resilience here in the context of the "*whinges*" and "*moans*" with his colleagues. Because resilience was a major theme in the study, I asked him what he considered the meaning of it to be: "*being able to withstand the pressure of*

everyday teaching and perform well." Whilst I had not asked Anna and Paul specifically this question, I made a note to incorporate it into the remaining interviews to get a sense of the understandings the participants attached to this. Peter's descriptions of his relationships with colleagues in this way resonated from the literature around relational resilience in 2.6.2, as he explained that he shared an office with the other pastoral leads and described the environment in the room as a place where, *"you can sort of vent, or you can ask for advice."* Sharing workspace also featured in Paul's narrative, and Peter explained this was important because:

"They are other people that are facing the same problems on a day-to-day basis, and they have the same frustrations, so they are people with commonality to be honest."

I felt that this was a powerful statement because Peter had attached a trust to his colleagues which related to their mutual responsibilities in their roles. There was an understanding across them all about the emotional labour that is teaching, which is described by Howard and Johnson (2004) (2.5) in the context of the susceptibility of teachers to burnout. Peter was describing this in the context of his role as pastoral lead:

"It's more to do with frustrations with kids that are driving you mad rather than anything to do with your colleagues or anything like that but it's the students that are not basically toeing the line and you end up ringing home 25 times every two weeks, that sort of thing."

This cultural understanding between Peter and his colleagues extends into the considerations around social capital within a group. Portes (1998) (2.3.3) places this in the context of the inter-relations between people and this resonates with Jordan (2004) (2.6.2) and the power of the social group for support. This shared understanding was also how Paul described his relationship with the Head Teacher and the awareness of the demands that are placed on teachers whose disciplines extend to extracurricular activities.

School Trips & Extra-Curricular Activities

Peter was active in a variety of clubs and was commonly present on school trips. He placed some of the activities onto his map. When I asked what the impact of his participation in these groups meant for him, he told me that he enjoyed getting to know people better:

"We've got quite a lot of female members of staff so we're always desperate for male members of staff to go on trips...my kids have left home so my wife doesn't mind me going."

Peter was retired from his previous career and his contribution to extra-curricular activities created an enjoyment in his work that wider participation in school life and teaching can bring. This social side of his work, through attending trips and being part of the clubs that combined with his own interests, he felt, were an advantageous aspect of his work.

Motivations and Future Career

Peter was planning on retirement at 60, which he explained only gave him a few years left in teaching and whilst he would like to oversee the pastoral side of school from a higher leadership position, he did not foresee this happening. He was happy to continue with his present role. His motivation came, not from his relationships, he said, but from the fact that he *“just enjoy(ed) his job.”*:

“I’ve changed career to do something that I wanted to do, so my motivation is more from me to be honest than from other people because I took quite a large pay cut to start being a teacher, so my motivation is down to me.”

He felt that his previous career, combined with his age and life experience helped with managing the demands of the role. This resonates with Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) (2.3.4) on professional capital, where they present a combined form, human, social and decisional capital which is also reflected in an individuals’ sense of efficacy and agency. Peter felt efficacious in his work and the support he sought was not about his abilities, rather an extension to them. Being secure enough to seek advice from more experienced colleagues is part of an individuals’ agency to enact change without the fear of judgement. He explained that due to his age and experience, *“I am not quite as frightened as I was when I was younger so I’m not particularly worried about making my feelings known.”* Peter felt that his age made a difference to the way that people viewed him in school because they assumed that he had been in teaching for longer. This meant that he had observed how he was treated differently in the way younger, but more experienced colleagues were, and he found, *“it’s quite amusing to watch to be honest.”* This did make me think briefly about Paul and the experiences that he had

shared during the interview and whether his age had been a factor in his conflict with his senior leader.

Post-Interview Reflections

As the interview concluded I asked Peter if there was anything he felt that we had not captured during the interview, but he said not. He was sent the link for the post-interview questionnaire however, he had not completed it at the time of this analysis and despite several follow-up e-mails, this remains the case.

4.5 Julie – Head of Science (Departmental Middle Leadership)

Julie was Head of Science in a small secondary school. She had been department lead within this school for 5 years, however had a recent appointment to Assistant Headteacher. In 3.4.4 I discussed my justification for her inclusion on the study and whilst I was wary about including the information about her new role for fear of exposing her identity, it is important for the analysis in my study. Julie had been sent the information about the study through a contact within my own network. She had previously worked in the school where I was based at the start of my doctorate and therefore, I had an awareness of the teaching team that was in place when she had been there. Although there was limited discussion about any remaining relationships since her move, given that we were both teachers of science it did mean that many of the people she referred to, I had either an awareness of or a relationship with.

The narrative which is analysed here is organised following the order of the discussion in the interview and is structured around the key themes as presented by Julie:

Trusted Colleagues

Julie had only recently been promoted to her new position and she valued the support of a colleague who was more experienced than her. She explained that she viewed them as *“the person that I can go and talk to about my work issues.”* They would attend meetings together and were in constant discussion over issues involving school, such as students, teachers, assessment. Whilst they were not friends outside of school, Julie considered them a trusted colleague:

“(They) can just say ‘you’re being daft. Right, you can’t do that all. That’s the thing you don’t have to do. Like that sort of thing; (they) give me perspective right a lot of the time.”

This relationship was important to Julie as it gave her *“perspective”* and provided a grounded and pragmatic viewpoint when she was feeling overwhelmed with her workload. What was important for Julie was that *“you can have a moan without it mattering”*, the knowledge she was able to express feelings without judgement were key factors in this relationship. Peter had also discussed this, albeit later in his interview, around the environment in the shared office he worked in. There was a shared understanding of the pressures of the role and as Julie explained, this was a *“two-way”* exchange. Across all the participants in my study, there is a recognition of the importance of having colleagues with whom there is the reciprocity of support between them. This was a significant feature within the social network literature (2.2.2) where the mutuality of dependence and action strengthened the social bonds between people. Julie shared an office with her colleague as well as with other members of the leadership team. Whilst she chose this colleague as the person she

would approach for advice and emotional support, access to the other members of the team were also important. The ability to chat and have conversations around different ideas were factors which Julie felt were important to her. For Peter, Paul and Julie, the shared office space made that reciprocity easier to access.

Julie felt that her most trusted colleague in the department was one with whom she could gauge how things were working because she knew that they would *“just give me the absolute, brutal, honest truth.”* She explained that this was a critical feature in their relationship and that the trust had developed over time:

“I would say it’s a really supportive relationship both ways, surprisingly so, because when I started here, I thought (they were) my biggest problem but (they’ve) actually turned out to be, I think, the biggest ally in a way”

Reflecting Julie’s descriptions of the notable features in her relationship with her colleague in the leadership team, there were similar attributes around reciprocity and trust expressed in her department-based colleague also because she recognised their honesty. Reciprocity in relationships was an important feature in the bonds between people when considering their social capital (Portes, 1998) (2.3.3) where Lin (2008) suggests the investments in social relations can result in expected returns which I consider to be represented here by the support and trust Julie is attaching to her colleagues.

Regional Science Consortium

Julie attended a Regional Science Consortium where the local heads of science would meet once or twice a term to discuss issues around curriculum and assessment.

Although she vaguely knew most of the members of the group, the collaboration had strengthened the relationships between them:

“I knew them, but I didn’t have the relationship I have with them until we had that group if that makes sense? It makes a massive difference.”

The difference she referred to revolved around being able to discuss issues surrounding middle leadership with other people who were also in the same position and therefore, there was a shared understanding of the issues:

“We email each other a lot as well so they email me just to say, ‘what did your Year 11 do in their mocks?’ ‘What are their results?’ And then I’ll be to them – it’ll be something that their Head has asked them to do or something that they can’t do.”

The access into each other through e-mail because of the developing relationships through the group was important. Fredrickson (2004) (2.6.2) suggests that these connections or social bonds act as a reserve and, across the narratives so far, the supportive nature of groups of people who all have a shared understanding of the challenges and dilemmas of their roles has been important.

One of the benefits of the regional group for Julie was the access to local support in the delivery of the curriculum and the sharing of resources. Julie’s school was small and therefore, being part of a larger group meant that she was able to *“join forces with”* larger schools and gain access to their resources. The group, Julie explained, had sought meetings with exam board representatives, because they were *“looking for a way forward”* around the challenges of the new curriculum and assessment changes.

The size of the collective group had secured in-person presentations, something that Julie explained would not have been possible for a school of her size individually: *“...you can’t do much in your own school because, especially in this school, because it’s very small.”*

To share the workload and resources demanded of the change in examination structure, the group had decided that the schools in the consortium would all adopt the same exam board.

“We got them all in to talk to us when the syllabus was changing and the [exam board] was the one that we went with, that we thought was going to be the best one so ... that works well.”

The group Julie is part of would be considered a PLC, as identified by Hord (2004) (2.2.3), and the shared visions and shared practice within the group, which Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2016) (2.4.3) would describe as relational resources. These resources, for Julie, enabled the group to act as agents of change, especially around areas of reform and implementation of policy as they collectively made decisions around exam board and curriculum structure.

Departmental Relationships

Julie had previously identified a department colleague who helped her gauge how well the department was running. This was important for her because her new role as Assistant Head meant she spent more time outside of the department. This was the only relationship which she considered to be ‘two-way’ in the sense of mutuality of honesty and trust with her department team. In contrast, she appeared more

detached from the others: *"I think that's more one-way than anything as in me managing them."* The one-way description was the result of how she perceived she needed to manage the department and retain a level of emotional distance between herself and the department staff:

"...(they) need very firm instructions of what to do...they have to do in certain times and then they'll say, like I have to them, tell them off, do you know what I mean? So, it's not a two-way supportive relationship with them."

Julie described this hierarchical approach to the distribution of leadership within her department, in contrast to Anna, who described an *"interwoven"* approach between the staff. Julie described one member of the department as *"having a book"* in which all conversations between them were written down. This resulted in Julie being very guarded in her conversations within the department, and although she discussed the sharing of resources for teaching with her team, she maintained a distance between them.

She expressed that having seen her network laid out she felt *"sad"* because it seemed so small, but as she reflected, she felt that the relationships were good, not superfluous, and everyone involved benefitted from them:

"...they are good relationships. I'm quite easy to ask for advice and not be bothered in that sense and other people ask me for advice as well, which is quite good, so most of them are two-way relationships to be fair."

This was an interesting observation by Julie at this stage because a common theme across her narrative, which was reflective of the other participants, was the impact of the network for mutual support and the sharing of knowledge and resources.

Access to Expert Knowledge and Resources

Julie's knowledge, through the regional science group, meant that she had an ability to access other heads of department locally and she used this support network for both curriculum knowledge and specialist equipment. The school where Julie worked was small and, as she had explained previously, this meant they had limited access to resources. Although being a small school had advantages, such as knowing all the students and staff well, the smaller budgets compared to the larger schools in the area meant the ability, for example, to purchase specialist science equipment was limited. Julie was able to use her network with the schools in the area to borrow equipment and join up with larger schools for trips which she considered to be advantageous for her students.

Her network also gave her an ability to discuss a wider range of issues with others who had more experience or insight. Sharing has been a commonality across all the participants, and a common feature of the impact of their networks and relationships is the ability to share:

"We kind of share ideas through that so I would say that I would email (them) now if I needed something, I wasn't sure about something, I want some advice or something and (they) would reply."

Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2016) (2.4.3) discuss the impact of teacher relationships on agency. To have a culture where the mobilisation of collective resources and the sharing of knowledge offers a level of support to teachers who are under a constant pressure around performance and accountability enables them to achieve or retain agency in their work.

Career Progression and Family Balance

Julie described herself as *“not particularly ambitious”* and felt that her career progression was a result of her relationships with colleagues, and she considered this to be *“by circumstance more than anything.”* Her decisions to apply for posts was either the result of encouragement of previous line managers or, in the context of her recent promotion to the leadership team, because she recognised the strength in her abilities:

“... the other people who were applying, I just thought ‘I’m so much better than you. I could do that job much better.’”

She felt that she had reached a point in her career where she did not want to move any further up the leadership ladder due to her family commitments. In terms of her career, to continue to manage the balance between the demands of family and teaching commitments she felt that she was more likely to *“move school and move down back to just Head of Department.”* However, as she was not willing to commit to commuting, she had resigned herself to remaining in her dual posts at her current school.

The challenges faced by teachers in this phase of their career is represented across the participants in the study so far. Anna and Paul had also expressed the need to balance their work commitments with their families. This contrasted with Peter whose previous, extensive career meant for him he no longer had dependent children or the financial demands that required him to consider his work in the same way.

Resilience

Julie's position of resilience was *"...kind of managing, getting on with it, being able to keep up."* Julie felt that she was resilient because she was *"...good at compartmentalising..."* This idea of being able to separate out her work and home life were important factors in her ideas around resilience:

"...that's why I don't talk about school outside of school because I'm not at school anymore. I turn the phone off and don't look at e-mails when not at work."

Her description of the mechanics in her approach, by *"compartmentalising"* the important aspects in her life, meant she was able to dedicate time sufficiently to each of them. As we were coming to the close, I asked Julie if there was anything we had not captured in the study, and she returned to the ideas of resilience:

"No, I don't think so. It's a juggling act. That's what I feel my life is, especially at work. It could be easier, but it is, it's just busy. The amount of time that you're busy is ridiculous. Like sometimes I don't get like lunch and stuff like that so the enormity of it is quite over-powering at times, but it comes back to

that resilience bit, isn't it and it's the perspective and going and having a chat with somebody and then bringing you back down again."

It is a long extract, but it expresses the essence of many of the stories told by the participants so far; the, at times, over-whelming features of being a teacher, but keeping perspective, often through chats with trusted colleagues and friends, to help maintain the commitment and motivation to the everyday which is the essence of resilience as described by Gu and Day (2013) (2.6.1).

Post-Interview Reflections

Julie was sent the post-interview questionnaire to complete, however, like Peter this was not returned completed. Therefore, there are no post-interview reflections to add to Julie's narrative in the study.

4.6 Matt – Head of History (Departmental Middle Leadership)

Matt described his school as a large, high-achieving 11-18 secondary comprehensive, which is part of a Multi-Academy Trust. He stated that his middle leadership role meant he was responsible for the delivery of the History curriculum and results across all Key Stages. Within his department, he line-managed four specialist history teachers, and he was also a school governor. Matt had changed careers and moved into teaching to spend more time with his family. He had agreed to participate in the study as he had received information through the Alumni and made contact independently.

Following the opening question, Matt immediately selected his department as a collective of people that he would have the most conversations and relationships with around his working day.

Department Relationships

Matt considered his department as being his first point of contact for everything work related. There was a mutual influence across all the members of his team and their conversations were a constant flow around school related issues, such as curriculum and students. One of the assets for the department was their shared office that enabled a natural flow of conversation: *“we all share an office, so it’s done very informally but also quite immediately as well.”* Other participants had also expressed their appreciation of the proximity of their colleagues in their workspace because it facilitated conversations, both socially and professionally.

“I’d hesitate to use the word ‘banter’ because I think it’s got negative connotations, but it’s informal support.”

Paul had used the word *“banter”*, however Matt was concerned this would detract from the professional nature of his conversations, even though he considered them informal:

“...it works without, you know, formally dividing tasks between us – well sometimes we do but it just tends to work; we just muck in, and I think because they know it works both ways.”

Through the phrase *“muck in”*, Matt described the shared responsibility across his department, without the need for a formal distribution of tasks. Through his positive

relationships there was joint ownership of the success of the department and each person, from Matt's perspective, was contributing to the running of the department. This description of the department structure was like Anna who described her team as *"interwoven"* with each member valued equally.

Senior Leadership Relationships

Matt considered his relationships with the senior team to be *"slightly more formal"* than those within his department. He suggested the relationships with the leadership team began formally, however over time and wider interactions this had developed into a more open flow of conversation and he emphasised *"honest"* conversations: *"... they're very open and you can have very honest conversations with them."*

The wider interactions for Matt were through his role as school governor and provided opportunities for additional dialogue with the senior team. This, he felt, had led to reduced formality in their interactions. Anna had also expressed a similar feeling when she discussed her relationship with a member of her senior team with similar interests. For Matt, this had led to breaking away from the formality of their conversations:

"You can chat to them, you know, they're very open and, you know, very good at being diplomatic but I suppose from my point of view I wouldn't necessarily bother them, for want of a better word, unless I had a particular reason to."

All my research participants had expressed the same feeling with their relationships with the senior team; unless there was a reason to speak to them, generally there was a detachment between them in a way that was not present with their departments.

Whilst he considered the senior team to be supportive, the informal nature of his relationships with his colleagues had a significant impact: *“the more informal support is what keeps your morale up and keeps you smiling really.”*

Matt was, through his own reflections of the relationships, expressing the positive impact of his relationships. However, he did raise an interesting observation around the limitations of this support:

“If the more formal routes of the Leadership Team and the Pastoral Team aren’t being effective, and thank God they are, but if they’re not then actually that wouldn’t be enough in itself, the informal support.”

This was a very interesting observation as Matt was suggesting the combination of relationships were important in the effectiveness of the school, that the informal relationships would not be enough to counteract the impact of poor relationships or management with the leadership teams.

Curriculum Network Group

Matt was a member of the local History Federation. This group had similar objectives to the science consortium Julie had discussed in her narrative. They met once or twice a term and the purpose was to connect schools together and create a community of teachers whose interest was around the History curriculum. Matt felt there was *“comfort that other people were coming up with the same idea”* in their discussions. Because he was part of a large school with a large department, he had contact regularly with history teachers so had access to professional support, however he recognised the significance for the teachers in the smaller schools in the area:

"If they're at small Schools, maybe the only History specialist, and I think they can feel quite isolated so it's noticeable sometimes how much they get out of it just being able to be amongst a group of other History teachers."

Julie had expressed the benefits of this type of support from being within a curriculum-based community as her school was small and therefore had limited resources. Matt described very similar areas to Julie of the discussions within their PLC, such as the exam structure, teaching resources, and marking policies. Through these discussions there is a hint at the degree of agency Matt felt through this group; this collective of people discussing issues have influence over policy and curriculum design within departments because of the sharing of resources and ideas: *"We all chose to do the same Board at GCSE for example, thinking that, you know, we'd get through better together."*

The strength of the curriculum group in support of resource sharing and discussion around teaching appears to be a significant driver for the collective decision over the choice of exam boards by department leads. Julie had explained the size of her group made it easier to garner support from other organisations, which would have been difficult to achieve as individual schools. Matt also expressed the same when discussing the impact of the local schools all choosing the same exam board for History:

"So that's been really useful that we're all with the same Board and we're thinking of writing to the Exam Board about the most recent exams and pointing out what we think were some of the deficiencies...if we do that on a

Federation basis it's more powerful than individual Schools doing it and we might get listened to, you never know."

Matt suggested the combined voice has more impact when discussing issues within the National examination and assessment systems, and therefore, even the teachers in small schools, through the collective of the group, can be heard.

Social Impact of the Network

Matt highlighted places such as morning meetings or the photocopier as locations for starting wider relationships outside of the department:

"...they move from relatively trivial relationships into more meaningful professional relationships but they're still very friendly relationships and you start getting more out of them."

It was important to him that he met with colleagues outside of his department and that over time the relationships would develop: *"Just by talking to people I suppose...building that up over time."* He identified having the opportunity to *"talk"* and *"over time"* was important and Anna also identified with the need for time to build effective relationships. *"Some people you build more rapport with than others and that's, you know, in a way just reflective of each other's personalities."* Matt described a school structure which allowed people to meet with colleagues across departments as important, but his own personality contributed to the formation of social relationships. Matt identified the impact of groups of teachers being involved in a joint activity as having a positive effect on their relationships as colleagues and this extended into sports and those teachers who live within his own locality: *"...created a*

more informal network of people that I know and actually they've become better kind of colleagues because (I) know them outside of [school]."

This reflection for Matt mirrored aspects of the literature around relational resilience in 2.6.2; Matt's description of the positive effects of playing sports together on their relationships within the workplace because he had created a support structure to call upon when needed. Matt was describing an open flow of conversation, without agenda, *"...you'll flit easily from entirely trivial conversations to actually relatively serious conversations, but it is quite fluid"* which allowed for a natural and unchoreographed development of trust and connection. This was reflected in his previous statement how through sports his relationship with colleagues has *"become better"*.

Like Peter, Matt met regularly with friends who were also teachers, and their conversations were dominated by comparisons between their schools:

"Inevitably, because we're both teachers at Schools in the local area, that's what we talk about...comparing really what's going on in each other's Schools, very informally, but you know 'we're just doing that' or 'we're just doing this'."

These discussions of teachers across schools meant the nature of talk within a network and the interlinks across networks, could influence and impact on policies and procedures within clusters of schools. Matt suggested this might not be a conscious act, but the information could have impact later should something similar arise with school:

“...subconsciously; only very subtly but, you know, perhaps it’s committed to the memory bank for when it might be useful, and I can say ‘ah I know that they’re doing that at another School’.”

Family Support

Matt’s family support and work-life balance were important. He explained he valued the support of his wife when he was training to become a teacher but both he and his wife recognised the investment because his career change would give them more time together. Like others in my study, the divide between home and work was important, especially as a way of separating between the two:

“I think it’s actually being able to get away from work and having, you know, having something different go on at home, which I think is really helpful...it’s nice to have that separation...”

Earlier in our conversation Matt had discussed the positive impact of working within the locality of the school and being involved within the community. His family life and support meant *“I’ve still got that little bit of psychological and physical distance from school that you can get away from it when you need to.”* Matt’s reference to the *“psychological”* was interesting because it was referring to the need to break away mentally from work. Julie had described this through *“turning the phone off and not looking at e-mails when not at work”*, and Anna has explained that her drive home was the time when she *“sifted through”* to enable her to be present with her children once she was home.

Resilience

As part of the interview process, Matt was asked what 'resilience' meant to him and where he felt his network supported that:

"...it means not being too down-hearted when things don't go well. And I suppose the flip side of that is not being too happy and complacent when things do go well..."

Matt described resilience in terms of maintaining an equilibrium, but he also added *"but resilience to me is your ability to keep going forward even if you face difficulties, obstacles, challenges, yeah..."* This description from Matt was like that of Peter and Julie which draws on Brunetti's (2006) (2.6.1) on 'staying the course' when navigating challenging and demanding events or periods of life.

Matt also described aspects of his support network that he could draw on: *"Family definitely. I suppose this element of sport is a release as well."* He felt that the biggest aspect for him in maintaining an equilibrium, was around perspective which he described as:

"...a lot of this is about putting things into perspective and actually realising that, you know, what you think might be really a big setback today is fairly insignificant tomorrow..."

Matt felt his department played a significant role for him to be able *"get things off his chest."* Across the narratives so far, there has been a combination of discussion around the use of the participants' networks for access to expertise and for emotional support. Matt summarised this when discussing his thoughts around resilience:

“...just getting things off your chest and being able to talk about things I think helps and that’s not necessarily talking about things to get advice, it’s just getting it off your chest and I think that’s an important part of teaching, is having these formal and informal networks just to be able to, you know...Sound off.””

Matt’s personal thoughts around resilience highlighted the role of family and the informal relationships with his colleagues, either through sports, connections across the school structure or locality. Whilst he did not consider these necessarily as drivers for resilience but more for perspective, maintaining perspective could be considered an important facet of resilience.

Career Progression and Motivations

When asked if he used his network in his consideration of his future career development, he answered, *“...not directly. I suppose I’ve got one eye on that really.”* He felt he had found a school where he could spend the remainder of his career as he felt that the school’s values and his were aligned. This was an interesting observation, especially when considering his comments earlier in the interview where he had explained he did not feel his informal relational support would be sufficient to withstand the effects of ineffective school management. Matt had described the leadership team as approachable and where he was able to *“have honest conversations.”* Matt was committed to the school and was happy to allow opportunities to arise. He was keen to establish that he considered his network as a form of support rather than a driver for progression, that if he was driven to cultivating his network, it was to be effective in his role:

"I probably have more of this network to keep me sane as much as anything else...having said that, if you do establish good relationships then people can be your advocates can't they when things happen, or you can be thought of well, so I'm not saying I don't sometimes try and cultivate relationships for those types of reasons but it's not necessarily...the driving force".

This would indicate that Matt appreciated the benefits of social interaction and the benefits that brought. Whilst his persona leads him to be open to new possibilities and opportunities, he also valued the physical space of connection and communication. In the interview, the way in which Matt described his personal and professional life is suggestive of an effective work-life balance, where can manage the demands of middle leadership, and is open to support from his peers, work colleagues, sporting activities, and home life:

"I'm personally and professionally content at the moment. That said, I guess I wouldn't want to do what I'm doing forever either but at the moment those two aren't in conflict."

Post-Interview Reflections

Matt appeared to have enjoyed the interview and mapping process. He had felt that the visual presentation of the network had *"...helped to define it and understand it in a way I'd never considered."* He felt that by putting himself at the centre of the map gave him a *"sense of belonging"* in his network and had helped him feel *"supported in all sorts of personal and professional ways."* This had meant he felt that he had not discussed the impact of his friends outside of his professional life. Since the opening

question to the interview, as discussed in 3.5.1.2, was specifically focused on ‘matters concerning work’ this meant that wider friendships outside of work may not have been included from the map. However, both Julie at the end of her interview and Matt in his response to the questionnaire asking what they felt had not been covered, suggested the impact of the wider friendships on their well-being was absent from their narratives. I draw on these reflections further in 6.5 ‘Limitations’.

4.7 Reflections on the Current Themes from the Participants Narratives

Across the five narratives explored so far, there were many common themes around the importance of trust and reciprocity across the relationships in the participants’ networks. The need for emotional support from people who understand the demands of teaching and can assist in maintaining a perspective were important elements in the emotional support the participants valued. The five participants had a wide variety of people who they considered to be part of their networks and represented a range of formal and informal relationships. This mirrored a considerable amount of the literature around social network structure, discussed in 2.2.2, and whilst each participant had individual stories, there was a similarity in their experiences. The participants had expressed some feelings of frustration and stress through the demands of the roles, however, except for Paul, none of the participants had described any negative feeling towards their work. In 3.4.2 I discussed a potential issue in the recruitment process of non-respondent bias as presented by Watanabe, Olson & Falci (2017, pg. 324). This could result in a limited range of narratives captured through the study and, because of the similarities in the narratives, I did wonder whether I had reached a plateau in the voices that would be heard.

4.8 Linda–Head of IT (Departmental Middle Leadership)

Linda worked for the same school as Anna, which was part of a Multi-Academy Trust. She described her role as Head of IT and managed two teachers as part of her department. She held the highest qualification of the participants of the study, which included an EdD. Linda referred to her career path as “*chaotic*” and of all the participants, she had been in teaching the longest. Linda had received the information about the study from a colleague who had forwarded her the information. She had chosen to take part and, whilst not part of my own network, she was a participant with whom I had a commonality as we both work for the same MAT.

Linda was initially reluctant to begin drawing her map and I responded to this by taking my lead from her, reflecting her body language, and creating space to find a place where Linda felt comfortable to begin.

Curriculum Support Group

Linda felt she was isolated and needed to resolve problems for herself: “*I get the tools to do it myself and no, nobody fixes anything for me.*” However, her frustrations appeared to stem not from her own limitations, but that she was left “*to do it herself.*” At this early stage of the interview, Linda expressed an anger and frustration within her role that had not been apparent to the same extent in the other participants. She was an experienced teacher of 30 years and held two master's degrees in education as well as a doctorate which would indicate a high level of human capital as described by Schultz (1961) (2.3.1). Linda was demonstrating her

ability to make decisions and identify resolutions quickly, which would suggest that she has a good sense of her own self-efficacy, as described by Bandura (2000) (2.4.1).

Linda explained she used Twitter to access support, socially and professionally. Her Twitter network appeared to be a significant avenue for support around curriculum issues and gave her the ability to have contact with many people who were also in similar situations through the teaching of IT and Computer Science in schools:

“...that the head honchos have said ‘right we’re going to change it all and it’s all going to be like this’ and there was no training and there was no subject support and there was nothing, so we got together and said we have to support the staff...”

Linda described similar circumstances to Julie and Matt and the formation of a curriculum support group, which reflected the key intentions of a professional learning community (PLC) described in 2.2.3. The “head honchos” Linda is referring to the government, and she described her response to the curriculum and assessment changes which had been introduced in England, as “laughable.” Across Linda’s narrative so far there is a sense that she is very angry, cynical maybe, about where she finds herself and the current challenges faced within education.

Linda also attended a local group made up of department leads across the secondary schools in the area. Her philosophy towards these communities comes from the benefits of sharing and pooling ideas:

“I think my thing with this is you use other people’s expertise. You know, if they know, why are you re-inventing the wheel? Respect what they’ve done and use that, and it means you can cut corners.”

Despite this expression of ideology around PLCs, her experience locally had been different: *“Trying to get schools in (the local area) to share anything, probably even germs, is a nightmare from hell.”* She explained she thought the reason for this was schools are: *“I think they’re [the schools] too competitive.”* This was hinting towards Ball (2017) (1.2) who discussed the impact on education from the neo-liberal policies and directed parental choice. Daly et al. (2010) (2.2.1) suggest that school culture and leadership systems play a part in the capacity of teachers to enact change. Linda was suggesting something similar in her view, that her PLC was a sounding block around the changes to policy without any resolution or outcome as a result:

“I think it’s shared frustrations [over assessment changes]. I think the fact that everybody’s pissed off about it does at least give a sense of collegiality. I think my problem with that is that, yes that’s all very well, but where does it go?”

Whilst there was no solution offered by Linda to this dilemma, her frustration was due to having to attend the meetings without there being any resolutions: *“I don’t get the time back; what have I achieved because I already know I’m annoyed about this structure.”*

The PLC had been useful for Linda, however, in terms of making contacts with other department leads in the area for advice and discussion around specific areas of need. This aspect of social capital, for Linda, was around using the group for gaining access

to expert knowledge rather than emotional support. Although the meetings would also inspire her to consider other ways that she could develop her curriculum and teaching in school, she did not appear to gain as much from her curriculum group as Julie and Matt had expressed they had:

“I think sometimes it starts a chain of thought about ‘oh I could do...’ so I think in that sense it’s a sort of support network of sorts on curriculum, but we don’t meet often enough for it to be anything more productive.”

Mental Health and Wellbeing

I felt at this stage of the interview that Linda had many frustrations which could be a result of her 30 years in teaching as suggested by Day and Gu (2010) (3.4.1). I did wonder whether her agreement to participate in the study had been motivated by having a need to be heard:

“The problem with this profession...nobody ever puts a hand on your arm and says ‘stand down; you’ve done enough. You are overdoing it’.”

She explained that over the course of her career she had witnessed many people who had had breakdowns and been affected by the demands of the stresses placed on them at work: *“...we have half a dozen staff here who are in danger of their cheese not knowing their cracker and nobody is helping them.”* She admitted, *“there’s only so much you can do because you’re too busy hanging onto your own cheese.”*

Paul and Julie had mentioned the effect praise had for them, and the recognition of their work and commitment. Linda had already expressed a dilemma in recognising

the build-up of stress in colleagues and the limitations of the help that can be offered due to others being at their own full capacity.

Linda explained previously that she recognised the need to “gripe” collectively about the pressures but had expressed the frustration at the lack of change which resulted from this. Watson (2014) (2.2.3) also suggested this in the context of PLCs and for Linda, if the emphasis was on community and less on areas of conflict, there would be little change as a result:

“I think that’s the biggest problem, to be honest, that we spend all our time sympathising – maybe empathising, but we don’t move it on...”

Across the previous participants there had been a sense of them using their network of family and close friends and colleagues to ‘let off steam’. Linda explained that she would rage in the office of the Deputy Head in school or would use exercise to work through her anger and frustrations: *“I have a dog...the walk starts off really fast and then six miles later you’ve burned off enough...you can’t let it get to you.”* In contrast to the use of exercise, Linda also referred to the use of alcohol and drugs by teachers as coping mechanisms for the stresses and demands of the job:

“Why do you think we have such an incidence of drug and alcohol abuse in teaching? It’s not because we all have keys to the cabinet.”

Linda had not suggested that this was something she had been affected by and I interpreted her use of the word “we” to mean the global ‘we’, as in the teaching community, rather than something she was including herself in directly. However, I

did make a note in my field notes that this had been the first occasion that a reference had been made to this aspect of the impact of workplace stress from the participants.

Resilience

Linda used the phrase *“you can’t let it get to you”* and her perspective on resilience was:

“Able to respond to stresses or stressors, bending rather than breaking, that sort of concept you know, like steel is resilient, that sort of thing.”

Linda used the metaphor of steel and the perspective of the amount of stress which could be withstood before breaking. Linda described the groups in her network as *“...backstops so that when I don’t know, then I’ve got something else which will give me the tools to move on...”* She was referring, as she had previously, to the use of her network for harnessing expert knowledge and advice. However, when looking at the map for emotional support she suggested: *“I think most of it you have to find yourself.”* The promotion of resilience as a personal attribute of teachers, Margolis, Hodge and Alexandrou (2014) (2.6.1) suggested can have damaging effects on teacher well-being. Linda explained that she had witnessed this within the workplace:

“I think [there are] too many demands on people’s resilience...I know way too many people who’ve gone home in tears because we don’t support each other”

Linda was cynical about the rise in workplace well-being promotions *“I do love the well-being golf.”* However, she felt that these events were not intent on dealing with the problems, only superficially addressing them:

“...how many times do we say ‘oh my God that person’s out again?’ Why doesn’t someone say ‘why is that person out again?’”

Linda was hinting at culture within the school which appears to target stress as being a personal failure rather than an endemic problem within the organisation. Shaw et al. (2016) (2.6.1) suggest that resilience is often directed at an individual level rather than a systems level responsibility and Linda expressed this when discussing recent conversations with the Head Teacher:

“...what’s bothering me is that (they) are not twigging that if that many people are letting off steam, somebody needs to do something about the temperature of the boiler.”

Linda’s narrative across the interview had been very suggestive of frustration, anger, cynicism. She explains: *“I do a 70-hour week. If you’re going to put anything else on my week, you’re going to have to take something off. I mean I’m looking at quitting teaching.”* Therefore, the disclosure of her intention to leave teaching did not come as a surprise: *“...this is the best job in the world but there is no reason to stay in it.”*

Accountability and Motivations

Linda’s intention to leave teaching was driven, partly, by workload but mainly *“an accountability decision.”* She explained that she had tried in the past to leave but had been persuaded by the Head Teacher to stay and that her personal finances were now the only hurdle to overcome before she could foresee leaving. *“I will miss the kids. I’ll miss some of the staff...but I won’t miss the bullshit and I won’t miss the*

treadmill....” Paul had also referred to the students as being significant driver in his decision to stay as they were a source of his motivation for teaching. During the interview Linda had often appeared angry and frustrated and now she was expressing a lot of bitterness around the pressures of the accountability which was placed on her as department lead:

“But we’ll all spend September for two hours being told how incompetent and unprofessional I am because my kids didn’t get top grades.”

Linda felt the accountability was “*unreasonable*” because there was an increasing array of accountability on her for her department “*[for] which I have no control and precious little influence.*” With such a small and inexperienced team, the lack of in-house support was having a greater effect than, for example, Anna who worked in the same school and yet had not expressed, to the same extent, the feelings of frustration as Linda.

Linda felt the isolation of staff within departments was a factor in her frustration:

“The problem I suppose the way we operate here is that we are so (curriculum) isolated...I don’t think that is unique to me.”

Linda suggested curriculum leaders were not acting as a collective in schools because there was the lack of autonomy and agency to be able to do anything: “*We’re all just sitting there going ‘yeah isn’t it shit?’ And we don’t have ownership enough to be able to do anything – that’s a political problem.*” The “*political problem*” Linda referred to was due to “*not being trusted as a professional.*” This issue around accountability was

something which appeared to be a significant driver for Linda's bitterness: *"...you'll always get people trotting with the 'oh the crap teacher'...but there are days and hours when we're all that one."*

At the end of the interview, I asked Linda if there was anything she felt we had not captured: *"No, I think I've depressed us enough."*

Post-Interview Reflections

Linda felt the mapping process had been *"interesting"* and allowed her to discuss different elements of her network. She was able to reflect on the impact of her networks and recognised that she had a *"...network of peers (to call upon) as when we need that support."* Therefore, for Linda, her network was not there in an everyday sense but rather as a collection of people whose expertise and support she could access as required. She reflected that her wider network *"...helped to prevent a complete sense of isolation"* which she felt as *"endemic"* in teaching. Linda was much more cynical of the educational structures and changes than the other participants and expressed her intention to leave the profession. However, she recognised her network *"sometimes stops me walking out"*. One of the limitations of questionnaire responses is the inability to follow up on the responses and therefore, it is not clear in what ways Linda considers the network being influential on her remaining in her role.

4.9 Sam-Head of English (Departmental Middle Leadership)

Sam worked as the Head of English within a large Secondary school, which is part of a national Multi-Academy Trust. She described her role as middle leadership and

managed the department with five other English teachers, who range in experience from the newly qualified to over 30 years in teaching. Sam, like Linda, had been in teaching for the longest of the participants in the study with 28 years' experience and she had also responded in a similar manner to Linda when describing her career path, where she used the word: *"thwarted"*. She was very keen to be involved in the study and had responded to the information posted on Twitter.

School Hierarchical Relationships

Sam explained within her school there had been a recent appointment of a new Head Teacher, and this had led to several strategy meetings. These were focused on the vision for the future and key areas of focus for the school. She explained that whilst she did have *"trust"* in their approach, *"...as Middle Leaders we want to put the brakes on a little bit and say, 'slow down; that's too much; that's too much change all in one go.'"* Sam felt her role as middle leader was to understand how:

"...as part of this vision, as an English Department, how we fit into it, and then it's my job to direct and support people in my department to be able to do that..."

Sam was describing the 'bridge' which middle leaders provide between senior leaders and department teams. However, she also felt that there were conflicts around middle leader 'autonomy': *"...they say, they want Middle Leaders to have autonomy, I feel I've got very, very little autonomy and I think it's just lip service to the idea of it."* She explained that the most autonomy she felt in her role was:

“...over something like what colour exercise books we have, quite trivial things really rather than anything strategic.”

She considered the school structure “*very hierarchical*” and when the curriculum leads in school met “*...we have like meetings and meetings where we get talked at by and large...*” Sam is describing a structure where she considered her role as head of the department was aligned to managerial in the implementation of a strategy rather than driving forward a vision for improvement within her department.

“There’s no decision-making so there’s no reason why we would ever come together to talk about anything or decide anything and in Middle Leadership meetings we’re just talked at...”

Sam had expressed her interest to be more involved with whole school strategy: “*I want to feel like I’m getting my teeth into something a bit more*”, which had been the motivation behind moving from her previous role. She felt she had experience in many areas from her career that she wanted to use to contribute to school, however she explained:

“I feel like nothing that I did previously is recognised in what I do now. I don’t feel that they tap into any of it at all and, you know, it’s there; they’re welcome to it.”

The result of these frustrations meant:

“I don’t feel fulfilled...I’m not contributing as much as I could and yet in terms of workload, I’m absolutely run ragged...I’m not working on things that I find enjoyable.”

Sam felt there was a culture within the school, driven by the legacy of failing OFSTED inspections in the past and a regime of scrutiny: *“...it’s a sort of institutional maturity [as a result of the OFSTED Special Measures] of the last 18 months...”* She explained the school had been placed into Special Measures, which is a category which schools are placed in as the result of failing an OFSTED inspection. As a result, they were given an action plan which was monitored every term through repeated inspections, and this meant there was a need to:

“...get everything codified and regimented to some extent because at some point in the past it wasn’t there, so now they’ve created it and want everyone to stick to it.”

Sam used the words *“codified”* and *“regimented”* to describe the procedural responses from the school being placed in Special Measures and she described the culture as *“very policy-driven”* because of the required conformity to the OFSTED targets. In 1.2, Ball (2017) and Furlong (2013) suggest that because of the drive of neo-liberal policies which have driven parental choice, the level of influence from OFSTED gradings has created the school cultures described here by Sam.

Department Relationships

Sam’s team was made up of teachers with a wide range of experiences and a wide range of personalities. She felt they were in the early stages of working as a collective unit:

“...we’re getting there...there are still things I would like to do, and I would like the department to do that we’re not or they’re not or I’m not doing yet, but that’s going to take a bit longer I think.”

She suggested part of the barrier to them working in the way she wanted was due to the legacy of the OFSTED experience: *“...I think it’s partly where the school had been in the past [and] it’s partly the vision of themselves as teachers.”* She explained she had tried to encourage a dialogue with the department around her vision within the English department and had shared some blogs with the team, but the response had been:

“No, we don’t just want to read other people’s thoughts on things, just give us resources; and that’s still got to change.”

Sam was trying to develop her role as leader within the English department, however the culture within the school appeared to be limiting her ability to have any agency around this due to the restrictions placed on teachers in the past. Sam was striving for self-development in her role as department lead and wanted to be a leader rather than a manager. However, the structural confines of the school culture were restrictive due to the historical need for *“regimented”* and *“codified”* processes.

Within the department there was one member of her team that she described as *“my closest personal relationship within the department and within the school.”* She put this down to the similarities between them:

“Similar age; we’re both, I think, more into literature I think than the others in the department so it’s just personalities, similarities.”

Sam explained that she trusted her colleague and considered her a friend. She would trust her with stresses and challenges in her work, but she would not want to “*burden her*”. Trust and reciprocity were important elements in the narratives across all the participants in their close colleagues and friends. Sam was describing this, not in the way that her colleague supported her but in the way she could support her friend. Although she regarded her relationships with the team as friendly, she considered it to be “*guarded*” when it involved work based issues, such as the timetable or discussions about teaching groups:

“I don’t want to be seen to, you know, be telling one person something and not telling everybody the same thing; it doesn’t seem fair.”

The need for fairness and members of the team not feeling excluded were driven by her experiences in previous schools and hinted at her use of the word “*thwarted*” when considering her career progress so far.

Multi-Academy Trust Relationships

Sam had several working relationships with members of the MAT the school was part of. The relationships had been established as part of the programme within the MAT for monitoring purposes. They had a significant impact on her role in school as they met so frequently, at least once a term, and she had a significant amount of preparation to do for them:

“...(they) come in every six weeks...speak to different leaders...(they) might base themselves in the department and spend time doing learning walks, looking in books, asking about assessments.”

Sam explained that the level of scrutiny was something which had taken a while for her to become acclimatised to: *“...you feel scrutinised all the time; absolutely all the time and you’ve just got to get your head around that.”* Across the narrative from Sam around the leadership structure across the school and the MAT, there appears to be little scope for Sam to extend her agency:

“...we all dread (them) coming in because you just know that if (they) see something that’s bad (they’ll) just absolutely slap you around the head with it which, you know, you just have to think ‘right OK; fair enough, you’ve got us on that one.’”

Sam felt the priorities of the MAT and the school were *“purely policy driven...nothing open about it whatsoever.”* Sam felt that whilst there was a rhetoric around looking philosophically at teaching and learning in wider discussions within the MAT, in practice the reality was:

“This is the way (they’ve) established it; this is how (they’ve) set it up; this is what’s been successful; carry on doing the same.”

She understood the MAT was interested in the results *“...that’s what matters, which is fair enough; that’s the business they’re in: they’ve got to show that they’re improving schools.”* However, these observations from Sam were interesting as they seem to indicate that examination results and OFSTED gradings were the only priority for the MAT at the expense of staff well-being.

There was a sense of frustration across Sam which seemed to circulate around the restrictions on her in her role. She had expressed, from different aspects of her map,

not feeling “fulfilled” and directed in her work through “policy driven” structures in school. However, she explained that she was “...the sort of person where I find my own way really.” She was hinting at a tenacity, an agency, where “...if this person’s not listening or this person’s not listening, I will go and find someone who does...”

Social Media Platforms

Sam’s use of Twitter had developed out of the frustrations she felt in her workplace. Her desire to discuss and be involved in educational debates around teaching and learning were “thwarted” by the “policy driven” agenda in her school: “[people on Twitter] I think they’re my type...” She expressed frustration that geographically she felt restricted in getting involved with opportunities in education that she saw in other parts of the country and therefore, Twitter was a way of her connecting with people outside of her “bubble.”

Sam’s use of Twitter as a platform for her to connect widely and have her voice heard in a larger community which is open to discussion about the issues in teaching and learning were important to her. Her conversations with colleagues could provide a “pressure release”, but she wanted to engage in a wider dialogue around education:

“...I think I am a clever person, and I really don’t get clever discussions in a lot of places and that’s why I’ve gone [to Twitter] I think as much as anything else.”

Sam’s agency in her workplace appeared to be limiting, however she had sought out an alternative environment where she can exercise more control. Twitter had provided Sam with an opportunity to present her ideas at a variety of conferences, which she had alluded to earlier as being an ambition and Archer (2017) (2.4.2)

discusses the use of agency to drive forward self-development, which she terms 'morphogenesis'.

Curriculum Support Group

Sam was part of a the local curriculum group: *"...you tend to see the same people, with the same sorts of messages..."* Sam's view of her own local group was: *"it's a network that's there to be supportive I think"* through sharing ideas and resources, but also as a mechanism for making new contacts: *"...[people] bring other English teachers....it partly could depend on what's on the agenda..."*

Sam explained that the group had been running for *"donkey's years"*, and like Linda, Sam also felt that conversations and discussions did not always move things forward, but as new people arrived it opened the door to new possibilities:

"...there is a new head of department coming in from (name of school) and (they're) changing the exam board to the one which we do...so that might mean we can take a shared approach..."

Sam was suggesting that using the same exam board created an opportunity for collaboration. However, she was cynical about the likelihood due to competition between schools, which Linda had also suggested:

"...they're [schools] all busy inward-looking rather than outward-looking and I think there's also a kind of changed landscape with, you know competition between schools and MATs....it [the group] is meant to be collaborative. I don't think people want their best stuff going elsewhere."

It was interesting that Sam referred to a *“changed landscape”* where she was talking about the impact of the Academy programme and the subsequent rise of the Multi-Academy Trusts as she felt had resulted in a reduction in collaboration between schools outside of the Trust structure.

Motivations and Career Progression

Sam’s enthusiasm for widening her network in terms of contact was driven by a desire to progress her career. She had used the word *“thwarted”* in her description of her career path to date and had often alluded to similar events more recently which had meant she felt the need to seek out new opportunities: *“Here I was told there would be opportunities; there aren’t...”* She explained that she had spent too long in her previous school: *“waiting for the right thing to come along and I was just with the wrong people, you know?”* Sam mentioned that she wanted to move into an Assistant Head role if she were to stay in schools but had been looking wider afield. She had found a temporary post that she was interested in, but she needed to secure a secondment with the school to release her: *“I’m not going to give up a full-time job with a mortgage to pay.”* These responsibilities were causing frustration for Sam because she felt that there were opportunities available elsewhere in the country, which, through her contacts on Twitter, she would be able to access and yet the geography was restrictive: *“I just think ‘bloody hell’ I can have conversations with, you know, Senior Minister’s Advisors and then I can’t get a Senior Leadership position around here.”*

Resilience

Sam felt resilience was about: *“keeping going”*. Sam suggested her network on Twitter had made a significant impact on her own resilience: *“I’m a much more resilient person that I used to be because I think – I think I’ve got value and a sense of self-worth from these other worlds.”* Sam described this network on social media as her support mechanism:

“My life has completely changed because of (them)...how I see myself and how I see my role and also in terms of resilience to deal with things that I don’t think are going well.”

She also explained that she thought this may have been the reason why she had made this part of her life so large, so that she had more contacts and therefore more opportunity for support:

“...when I was completely within just that little world [refers to previous school], it wasn’t enough and so there was a need for other things to kind of feed and support...”

Sam was describing this situation in her reflections around resilience; she was suggesting that where her agency had been restricted in the *“little world”*, there was a need for support. Once she had reached out to a wider audience and was able to feel control and enact change, she felt that she *“had value and a sense of self-worth.”* These intertwined elements surrounding Sam’s work, her workplace, the wider support she has been able to create has resulted in her feeling a sense of resilience which she did not have before.

I asked Sam if there was anything she felt we had not captured through the interview:
"...family."

Post-Interview Reflections

In considering the impact of her network and the research process, Sam suggested the *"past experience/memory"* aspect of the interview as interesting in the way that she had reflected on her interactions and the impact these had on her. For example, she identified that during the interview the way her own knowledge had morphed from the exchanges over practice with other people across her career. This recognition was important to her as she felt that aspects of her network were *"...hidden in documents and day to day lessons."* This was an interesting reflection and one that resonates within the literature in 2.3.2 on cultural capital and the reproduction of cultural knowledge through the exchanges within and across networks. Sam felt that the mapping process had *"made (her) realise a lot of things about how (she) thinks and feels about things"* and the experience enabled her to *"let go of some niggles"* and become more aware of the positive influences around her. Whilst she recognised that having her *"remote network"* was good, she also needed a *"close network of colleagues in the workplace and locally."* She felt she wanted to use the *"knowledge, support and inspiration from (her) networks"* to help her understand herself and her values so that she did not continue to *"hold herself back"* but to *"re-invest in positive actions and new beginnings."*

4.10 Reflections Across the Themes from the Participants' Narratives

In 4.7, I reflected on the stories from the participants before I had interviewed Linda and Sam and commented on the similarity across them. In 3.4.1, I used the work of Day and Gu (2010) to discuss the dilemmas and challenges of teachers in the different career phases. Linda and Sam would be considered as veteran teachers (ibid., pg. 105) which contrasts with the others who would all fall into the mid-career categorisations (ibid., pg. 86). Although all the participants had additional responsibilities through their role as middle leader, they did display the differences in characteristics suggested by Day and Gu (2010). For example, veteran teachers can become 'resentful' of new initiatives (ibid., pg. 106) and external policies (pg. 108) and this was present in the narratives of Linda and Sam, who displayed a cynicism which had been absent from the first five interviews. There is also a suggestion that mid-career teachers can often be at a 'crossroads' where they reconcile with their work-life balance and their continued commitment for the longevity of their careers (ibid., pg. 87). Within the narratives this was also present as Paul, Anna, and Julie had explored the impact their work had on their families. Paul had managed this through reduced teaching commitments, or "compartmentalising", as suggested by Julie, between work and home. Matt and Peter, offered other perspectives as they had both entered teaching as a career change and therefore, had a maturity in their approach and the way their colleagues responded to them. However, they were still early enough in their careers to not have the resentments suggestive of teachers with more than 23 years of experience, as was the case for Linda and Sam.

5. Chapter 5 Addressing my Research Questions

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I draw on the narratives explored in chapter 4 to address the research questions in the study. The purpose of this is to locate the commonalities and contrasts across the participants, to construct a combined narrative that enables a broad view of the lived experiences of middle leaders in secondary schools.

My analysis of the participants' narratives is adopting a thematic narrative approach (Riessman, 2008, pg. 53). This approach allows for a 'case-centred' focus, that of the individual participants, whilst viewing the narratives from the category-centred perspective of the themes in the research questions (Riessman, 2008, pg. 12). The research questions are focused across the constructs of capital, agency, and resilience. Therefore, the participants' narratives are considered across these major themes, where framework from the literature in chapter 2 and the methodological approach in chapter 3 are drawn upon in support of this interpretation and analysis.

The order of the research questions forms the structure of this chapter as each one is approached in turn. As discussed in 3.7, each research question is considered from both a deductive and inductive position, as described by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) (3.7.1). The rationale for this approach was for the framework from the literature to be deductively applied against the narratives, whilst inductively allowing the meanings and nuances of the participants' stories to be heard. Therefore, the chapter begins with a discussion around the networks and professional relationships

of the participants and concludes with the emergent themes across the narratives, which I consider to be part of the contributions to knowledge from my study.

5.2 Research Question One

Who do middle leaders include in their professional networks and why?

Wellman (2001) (2.2.2) suggests that people have their own personal communities through the networks they build and across my participants, there is a wide variety of people that they have chosen to focus on. Whilst there are differences in the categories these people would fall into, for example, close friends or work colleagues, there are common features of their inclusion. My study had attempted to place a work-based boundary around the networks through the opening name generation question discussed in 3.5.1.2, where Marin (2004) (2.2.2) suggested those included would have emotive characteristics for their inclusion. Therefore, I will first address ‘the who?’ is included in the participants networks and then consider ‘the why?’ the participants considered them to be significant.

5.2.1 The ‘Who?’

In 2.6.2, I discussed Gu’s (2014) exploration of relational resilience. In her study she identified three sets of relationships which were influential for teachers: these were ‘teacher-teacher, teacher-principal, and teacher-student.’ Across the participants in my study, the teacher-teacher and teacher-principal relationships were also present, however the teacher-student was not present in its inclusion as part of the network. I would consider this to be an anticipated outcome given the nature of the question, which was posed at the start of the interview, as it would be unusual for teachers to consider students as individuals, whom they would approach to discuss their work.

Instead, what were visible were family relationships and the ways the participants used their families for support and perspective, and the impact of professional learning communities and communities of practice.

The teacher-teacher relationships had many guises, for example, through close colleagues, departmental relationships, teachers from other schools, and connections made through professional learning communities, such as curriculum groups and social media. The relationships displayed a range of symmetrical and asymmetrical characteristics, as suggested by Breiger (1988) (2.2.2), which were dictated by the balances around power and friendship the participants considered them to have.

The teacher-principal relationships were apparent across the participants from the perspective of the senior leadership teams and only in a few cases, for example, by Paul and Sam, with a specific reference to the Head Teacher. These relationships were all asymmetric where the balance of power was held within the senior leaders and even where there was a mutuality between them in terms of shared hobbies or joint governance within the schools, the relationships were considered in terms of information coming from the senior leaders to themselves.

The relationships of the participants with their families and close friends displayed a consideration around their support outside of school. These relationships were important focuses for the participants as the reason they needed to maintain perspective and make their work-life balance a priority. These relationships provided a backstop for them, in terms of knowing they could rely on them for emotional and practical support, and these were spaces where they felt they could work through

problems or frustrations, whilst keeping in mind the need to not overload their families and be present for them.

From the narratives explored in chapter 4, there was a significant amount of attention paid to the content of the conversations and interactions they would have within their networks. However, my study is concerned with the impact of the relationships rather than the specific content of the discussions. Therefore, having established 'the who?', I will now address 'the why?' from the context of what the driving factors were for the inclusion of these key relationships.

5.2.2 The 'Why?'

Emotional Connections, Trust, and Proximity of Working,

In 2.2.2, Coburn, Choi & Mata (2015) suggest that close friendships, those with strong emotional connections, play a significant part in the inclusion of members. Anna selected her husband and close friends, who were ex-colleagues, and both Paul and Julie selected trusted workplace colleagues. The notable exceptions to this were Linda and Sam; both had chosen specific people or situations which were causing them a considerable amount of conflict or emotional stress at the time of the interview. Despite the differences in supportive versus confrontational characteristics in the selections of the network members, the choices by the participants align with Marin's (2004) (2.2.2) hypothesis on the emotional connectiveness of the people who are chosen to be included.

When considering departmental relationships, there were some variations across the participants which were most notable around the emotional connectedness and the

level of trust that was discussed. For Anna, Matt and Peter there was no distinction across different members of their department teams, where all members were of equal consideration in their impact. Anna has described her department as *"interwoven,"* (pg. 140) Matt explained that everyone would *"muck in"* (pg. 174) whereas Peter had drawn on the resilience he gained by sharing an office with people who *"...were doing the same job"* (pg. 160). These relationships were symmetric, suggested by Breiger (1988) (2.2.2), in terms of the equality across the team. In contrast, Julie, Paul, and Sam had specific members within their department teams that they trusted and as a result had different working relationships. Borgatti and Ofem (2015) (2.2.2) suggest there are homophilic reasons for people to maintain relationships with others and the trusted members of the networks were strongest where there were shared characteristics. This meant for Paul, Julie, and Sam they all had trusted individuals they could draw on for personal support as well as general discussions around departmental issues.

There is a suggestion in the literature by Borgatti & Ofem (2015) (2.2.2) that the selection of members in an individuals' network is often driven by their proximity, such as workspace location. Both Matt and Peter had selected their department teams based on their proximity to each other and the impact this had. The proximity of working was significant for the participants in the way they were able to access their colleagues easily. This was either through shared office or departmental space. This proximity of working was important for collaborative activities and discussions and had impact in the way the participants drew their agency and resilience from these relationships. This is discussed further in 5.4 and 5.5.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and Communities of Practice (CoP)

The second most significant feature of the structure of the participants' networks was that of being able to access expertise and resources. This was the most notable to be influenced by the PLCs the participants attended. The most prominent feature of the access into resources through Professional Learning Communities, where the literature in 2.2.3 suggests these groups have shared values and intentions, was usually around professional development and shared practice (Hord, 2004). Across the participants, many were part of formal curriculum support groups that were created by local schools working together. Julie, Matt, Linda and Sam all chose these groups as having significant impacts of their working lives and within them had been able to widen their networks and knowledge of others in the vicinity who were facing similar issues as themselves in their roles. The resources revolved around the sharing of teaching materials, best practice approaches in the delivery of the curriculum, as well as access into wider support in the form of collaborative projects. This collaborative approach had been particularly significant for Julie who worked within a small school and therefore felt she had limited resources and financial restraints which hindered her ability to provide similar opportunities for her students as those in larger schools. These opportunities came in the form of trips and visiting speakers where she was able to "...join forces with..." (pg. 167) members of the curriculum group. Matt had also expressed this observation of these advantages from members of the smaller schools in his support group. However, he as well as Linda, explained that another advantage of these groups was being able to talk to others around the subject areas, especially for predominately small departments such as IT or Music, which may only have a single teacher. Daly (2015) (2.2.1) suggested that the relational support, as

demonstrated here in the context of the PLCs, can result in increased retention amongst teachers and there is a sense of 'who you know defines what you know' (ibid., pg.2). Matt and Julie both were very positive about the increase in knowledge and skills for which these communities are drivers. However, Frankham (2006) and Riles (2000) in 2.2.1 both urge caution towards driving an 'institutionalised utopia' of an idealised view of the impact of the network. This had been expressed by Linda in her frustrations of collective discussions around such things as curriculum issues and needing to have an intention for enacting change. This aspect of understanding of the challenges was specifically important, as was captured within Linda's narrative who expressed a significant feeling of isolation and frustration, especially around the purpose of the "*shared frustrations*" (pg. 187); from Linda's perspective there may be a sense of "*collegiality*" (pg. 187) but without this resulting in a change, she considered it a waste of time.

Wider Access to Resources and Benefits

Outside of the formal curriculum support groups, the participants had their own communities, made up of individuals who may be teachers in other local schools, teachers in their own schools, or teachers who they met through sporting activities or social media. The way the participants had accessed this wider community was dependent on their own interests and experiences. Paul, for example, as a music teacher had a very wide network of people who worked within the music industry whereas Sam had constructed a wide network through Twitter, which was in response to feeling isolated in her workplace. On-line groups, such as Twitter or Facebook would be representative the CoPs discussed in 2.2.3, albeit virtually, which have the similar

intentions and values of the PLCs. However, as they have evolved out from teachers themselves, rather than an organisational collaboration of regional schools, the content is less structured towards specific learning intentions and more aligned to a platform for sharing. Across all the participants there was a consistent sense that teachers would congregate through their mutuality and the discussions would be heavily influenced by the comparisons across their schools and departments. Both Peter and Matt described these as common events on the commute to school or during sports meets. These comparisons often resulted in similar policies and practices in neighbouring schools and the uncritical inclusion of policies formed, what Watson (2014) (2.2.3) highlighted as, one of the unintended outcomes of learning communities and the 'silencing of dissonance' in formal settings.

In 2.2.1 Henwood et al. (2015) suggested the size of an individuals' network is not the significant factor, but rather the strength and reciprocity between individuals which holds the greatest influence. Across my participants this is visible through their descriptions and interpretations of their networks. Julie had said in her reflection of the mapping process that *"it was sad"* (pg. 169) that she knew so few people, yet also recognised her network contained *"good relationships...(which) are two-way"* (pg. 169). The lack of the reciprocity and strength across the relationships is a factor which appeared in studies on social isolation (Crotty et al., 2015) (2.2.1) and this was a feature in the narrative from both Linda and Sam. Linda had expressed feeling isolated because *"nobody fixes anything for me"* (pg. 185) which meant she had to be self-reliant, and Sam had turned to social media because of her feeling of exclusion in the workplace.

Reporting to Senior Leadership

The relationships with the senior leadership team in their schools was also significant for the participants. Across the previous reasons of inclusion, there is a sense of emotional support, an informality in their relationships and in their structure, and a sense of 'open' discussion and sharing through the networks. In contrast to the characteristics attached to the inclusion of trusted colleagues, department members, and teachers in wider communities of learning and practice, the relationships between the participants and the senior leadership team were much more formalised and organised around specific agendas.

In 1.4, I discussed the significance for my study of the participants being middle leaders. I explained because middle leaders provided the bridge (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012) between the classroom teachers and senior leadership, it was anticipated their relationships within school would span across the school structure. The findings in the study demonstrates this to be the case and all my participants drew upon their relationships with the senior leaders in the school as being part of their network in support of their roles. However, this support was, as hinted earlier, organised and scripted around specific agendas which Anna had described as "*a fixed arrangement*" (pg. 142). Throughout the interviews and responses from the participants, this same sense of distance from the senior leaders was consistent across the participants. Therefore, even though the middle leaders are described as representing a 'middle tier' in the school hierarchy (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012), it does not appear to be evenly distributed. This can be seen through the greater symmetry, as described by Breiger (1988, pg. 95), in the relationships between the participants and their departments

when compared with an asymmetrical presentation of power dynamics with the senior leader team. This asymmetry, explored in 2.2.2, could be due to the reverence with which some of the participants allocate the imbalance of knowledge, for example, Anna described as *“feeling out of her comfort zone”* (pg. 142) when in discussions with her senior team. Another contributing factor could be the level of accountability of the departments’ performativity which they need to present to the senior team, which Linda had felt was *“unreasonable”* (pg. 192) as she would be held responsible *“because my kids didn’t get top grades”* (pg. 192).

The exceptions within the participants’ narratives of this asymmetry were visible where there was a mutuality between the participants and the senior leaders. For example, Paul explained that his Head Teacher was experienced in the organisation of whole school activities and therefore, he felt they understood the demands he faced as the music lead in school. Peter’s previous career meant he was a valuable resource for the senior team in his expertise outside of the school system, and Anna had found common ground with one of her senior leaders through an unusual hobby. The connections with the senior leaders which the participants were referring to could represent a capital between them which led to a mutuality in this aspect of their relationship. The demonstration and use of capital with respect to relationships is explored in 5.3, however, it is an important part of the analysis here around the nature of the participants networks. This is because there is an indication of the significance of capital which underpins the nature of the symmetry within the relationships.

5.2.3 Response to the Research Question

The first research question was exploring the ‘who?’ and the ‘why?’ of the middle leaders’ networks. These are dominated by relationships with other teachers, whether this be within their own departments, within their own schools or as a continued friendship from previous schools, through PLCs, or social activities and social media. Teachers will come together across a wide variety of experiences and these relationships are strengthened and become more significant as the level of reciprocity and emotional connection increases.

The conversations which dominated the interactions between the participants and the members of the networks were concerned with their teaching practice and teaching resources, school policies, and curriculum and assessment. These conversations were common whether inside and outside of the school environment. The conversations about student issues, such as achievement and behaviour were more localised into the school setting, although the participants would talk with other department leads, with whom they had a degree of trust, in different schools about student gradings. The participants relationships with the senior leaders in their schools was more detached and asymmetrical, and they would only meet if there was an agenda or a specific issue which needed to be resolved.

Therefore, having established the ‘who’ and the ‘why’ of the participants’ networks, the next research question which is concerned with the nature of the exchanges in the network will be addressed next.

5.3 Research Question Two

In what ways do middle leaders use their professional networks and what is the nature of the exchanges between them?

To address the second research question in my study, I have chosen to use the construct of capital as a way of analysing the impact of the activities within the participants' networks. The research question is detailed above, and it extends from the 'why?' in 5.2.2. Across my participants the dominant reasons for selecting people who they included in their network were driven by the nature of their interactions. These were focused on emotional support from family, close friends, and colleagues; access to resources and expertise from colleagues and other teachers; or for accountability, which was the case for the senior leadership relations. In addressing this question around the roles relationships and networks play in the experiences of the participants, I explore not only the ways the networks are used but also what the nature of those interactions is from a perspective of the theories of capital. Therefore, following the order of capital approaches in 2.3, I begin the analysis with a consideration of human capital.

5.3.1 Human Capital

The OECD define Human Capital, in 2.3.1, as '...the knowledge, skills, competences and other attributes embodied in individuals that are relevant to economic activity' (1998, pg. 9). In my study all the participants are middle leaders and are all qualified as teachers and because of this all of them could be perceived as having a similar level of human capital. However, as I discussed in 2.3.1, my study is considering the attributes of human capital and the capital investment made by the participants through the exchange and gathering of knowledge and how these impacts on their role.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) (2.3.1) suggest human capital is reflected in talent, however they consider this is developed the most when groups and teams come together, I would suggest that this is more aligned to knowledge and is a relational resource. Whilst this has impact for later discussions in 5.4 on agency, these experiences are interpreted through lens of human capital and knowledge are explored here:

Knowledge Exchange and Sharing

Throughout the narratives from all the participants there is repeated reference to the level of sharing which exists in their networks. It appears that at any opportunity the participants will engage in conversations around teaching, with an aim to reduce workload, access expertise, or find out about alternative policy practices in schools. This theme of knowledge exchange appears in every interaction between the participants with other teachers, however, it is less apparent in the interactions between the participants and their senior leadership team, where it is more aligned to more knowledge extraction.

Julie, Matt, Linda, and Sam are all members of PLCs, discussed in 5.2.2. Julie described the content of these meetings, through their discussion around best practice and recent innovations in curriculum delivery, as *“looking for a way forward”* (pg. 167) and were important factors in the contribution of the participants’ human capital. Linda explained her attitude towards the learning she gained through the group was to *“...use other people’s expertise...”* (pg. 187). This is because it represents a development in their knowledge and skills within their curriculum areas and is an exchangeable commodity which they can take back to their departments in school.

Sam explained that as a group they would decide on the agenda for each meeting and members could bring other people who would provide additional access to expertise for them all to learn from. The use of community to gain access to wider expertise through the sharing and exchange of knowledge was not restricted to membership with the PLCs and many of the participants would also use social media to access material and resources to increase their knowledge around teaching practice and curriculum delivery. Peter and Paul both used Facebook groups, discussed in 5.2.2, which had evolved from groups of teachers connecting on-line to share resources and best practice. Paul had referred to this as “...see(ing) what resources I can nick” (pg. 154) and Peter had suggested that “...(he) could pick up some quite good ideas...” (pg. 159). In 5.4 the gain in knowledge is explored through the impact on agency, however, here the access to resources is explored from the perspective of the development of the participants transactional assets through their networks.

Knowledge Extraction

The interactions explored in *Knowledge Exchange and Sharing* represents the use of the participants interactions with other teachers. The continual dialogue around practice and curriculum dominated the narratives in my study and the exchange represented the symmetry and dialogic nature of the interactions, suggested by Breiger (1988) (2.2.2). In contrast, interactions between the participants and their senior team were more asymmetric. Although the participants would all meet regularly with their senior teams, the purpose of the meetings were not to ‘share’ ideas in a collaborative sense but as a discussion around a specific agenda, as Peter explained that he would go to his senior team if he needed advice. This was reflected

in Matt's narrative as he "...wouldn't necessarily bother them...unless I had a particular reason to" (pg. 175). Therefore, the knowledge gained from the senior team for the participants added to their working knowledge and experience which could be drawn upon at a later point. Anna had expressed her desire to use the meetings with the senior team for this purpose and the value gained from these interactions has important considerations for the later discussions on Professional Capital in 5.3.4 and in 5.4 around agency.

The gaining of knowledge through the use and nature of the interactions within the participants networks is not only significant from the perspective of their human capital but it is also significant for the next capital to consider: Cultural Capital.

5.3.2 Cultural Capital

In the previous section on human capital, the data around the participants' interactions within their network were explored from the perspective of the knowledge and skills they gained as a result. In this section, the data is explored from the perspective of cultural capital, explored in 2.3.2. Using the case comparison approach, I presented in 3.7.2, the participants' narratives are analysed here to identify how cultural capitals can be observed through the participants' experiences.

Membership to Cliques and Access to Support

In 2.2.2, Erickson (1998) explained where members of a network know each other, this can be considered as a 'clique'. Across the participants' narratives there are many examples of cliques, whether this be a department team as described by Anna, Matt, Peter and Sam or a PLC as discussed by Julie, Matt, Sam, and Linda. However, Erickson

(ibid.) also explains that for a group to be considered a clique there is an attitude where the members agree with each other or connected by shared values. This description would be aligned to the PLCs, discussed in 5.2.2, and described by Julie and Matt, for example, as a combined aim of sharing resources and providing support around the curriculum changes faced by the middle leaders in their neighbouring schools. The participants had access to the shared learning captured within these communities due to their positions as curriculum leads in their schools.

Anna was keen to explore her access into another exclusive group of people, the senior leadership team in her school. Her motivation for this was to expand her base of knowledge so she could converse with members of senior management to contribute to their strategic conversations. This was because she wanted to move into senior leadership. Through this approach from Anna, her intention was to be accepted as part of the senior team and be able to talk knowledgeably about issues. Whilst this was part of the analysis of human capital in 5.3.1 and Anna increasing her knowledge and skills to move her career forward. However, in 2.3.2 Aziz (2016) highlights that cultural capital is exploring the inequality attached to the access to knowledge, which human capital does not. Anna wants to use the cultural knowledge she can gain for the purposes of career progression. However, to gain this knowledge she needs to become part of this exclusive clique. Anna explained that through a shared hobby with a member of the senior team, it provided her with an opportunity to develop a relationship by *“breaking down those professional barriers”* (pg. 143). Borgatti and Ofem (2015) (2.2.2) suggest mutual interests enable the formation of relationships and Anna was excited about the development of her shared interest to enable her to access the senior team more productively.

Paul also referred to cultural understandings with his Head Teacher when he was discussing the challenges he faced in school. However, in contrast to Anna, from the perspective of cultural capital, Paul was describing how having a mutual understanding meant he recognised the support he received. As the music lead in school, Paul felt the pressure of whole school performances and organising a significant amount of extra-curricular activities. However, he had periods of conflict with members of his line management and senior management teams and his access to his head teacher for support was important for its resolution. He considered this support to be because of the Head Teacher's understanding of Paul's role: *"they know all the extra-curricular stuff, so I feel like they listen very well"* (pg. 150). Paul felt through their shared understanding he had faith and trust in them. Borgatti and Ofem (2015) (2.2.2) explain that mutual understandings, as described here by Paul, provide the opportunity for social connection and in the context of cultural capital, this aspect of Paul's network provided a support which he felt had been lacking in other leadership relationships.

Reproduction of Cultural Knowledge and Social Exclusion

At the beginning of 5.3, I explained how all the participants, through being qualified teachers and middle leaders, connected with multiple groups within their networks. These groups could have a formal structure, such as the PLCs described by Matt, Sam, Linda, and Julie, or could be more informal in structure, for example as Peter and Paul describe through groups of teachers meeting either in social settings or through previous acquaintance. Across all the structures, the level of sharing of ideas, policies, comparisons across schools, and curriculum resources were dominant features of the

conversations. The outcome for sharing at this level was a reproduction of the forms with which schools would inevitably approach the resolution to issues they faced. Matt describes this process as a “*subconsciously*” (pg. 180) storing of the information which is “*...committed to the memory bank for when it might be useful*” (pg. 180). Linda had also recognised the potential of the sharing as “*...it starts a chain of thought about ‘Oh I could do...’*” (pg. 188). Sharing across a wide variety of sources could be considered a positive outcome, with many benefits to teachers, departments, and schools, with Paul describing it as “*...just trying to cut down on workload...*” (pg. 153) or as Linda asks “*...why reinvent the wheel?*” (pg. 187). This exchange of knowledge through the variety of networks is described by Cross et al. (2003) (2.2.1) as a ‘knowledge economy’ where the resources being described by the participants can be considered a cultural commodity within the networks that teachers exist. Erickson (1998) (2.2.2) suggests such exchanges, as described the participants, are an integral part of social life and, as reiterated by Matt “*...to get comfort that other people were coming up with the same idea...*” (pg. 176), that people gain reassurance from the agreement with others around them. However, Frankham (2006) (2.2.1) expressed concern that the use of social networks as a solution to problems faced in educational reform had ‘exploded’ and Watson (2014) (2.2.3) suggested that there was an expected conformity within them which could suppress the possibility to enact change.

Across the participants there was a positivity towards the networks as a vehicle for sharing, however Watson (2014) (2.2.3) described this as a ‘cosy connotation’ which could mask differences and ‘become a means to produce silence’. Linda had expressed some doubts on the effectiveness of the sharing across the networks, especially,

where there was no mandate being given to the groups to enact change. However, it was Sam who spoke in detail of her own experiences within her networks and the social exclusion she felt by questioning the validity of the resources and policies which she, and her department, was expected to work within: “...it is purely policy driven...nothing open about it whatsoever” (pg. 199). The reason why Sam’s narrative around this issue, in terms of the analysis from a cultural capital perspective, is so significant is because she was the only participant to express the social exclusion she had experienced. As a result of her trying to exercise caution as to what she considered to be ineffective, wide-spread policies in her workplace, she had experienced a lack of inclusion with wider discussions on teaching and learning and this had, as a result, “thwarted” her wider ambitions. This raises a question whether she is a lone voice in my study or whether she is representative of the reasons why teachers feel they need to accept, uncritically, policies and processes because to question could result in having significant implications for their careers. This is discussed further in 5.3.3 and 5.3.4 in the context of the impact of social control and exclusion.

In the next section, I analyse the participants’ narratives from the perspective of social capital, that is, the apparent benefit of membership within social structures that cultural capital enables access to.

5.3.3 Social Capital

In 2.3.3, Portes (1998) suggests that social capital, in contrast to human capital, can only exist in the context of the interrelations between individuals, groups or organisations. Therefore, the narratives are analysed here from the perspective of the interactions within their networks.

Reciprocity and Trust

In Lin's (2011) (2.3.3) discussion on social capital, he suggests that 'one implication of the use of social capital is its assumed obligation for reciprocity or compensation'. Across all the narratives of the participants, there was evidence of the reciprocal nature of their relationships and interactions. For example, Peter described this in the context of sharing frustrations with people who have a collective understanding and therefore there is a level of honesty between them. Matt referred to this as his department "*mucking in*" (pg. 174) in a way that indicated they would work together, knowing that each would contribute to the success of team. For Peter and Matt, this embedded reciprocity led to positive outcomes, as they can visualise how the investments they made were also reflected in the investments from others for mutual benefit. This was also reflected in Julie's narrative around the collaborations with other schools because of her curriculum support group: "*I didn't have the relationship I have with them until we had that group*" (pg. 167). These new relationships had led to "*we email each other a lot*" (pg. 167) where they would share information and discuss their results or the challenges they faced from the senior leaders in their schools. Knowing the discussions would be reciprocated, and the shared information would be held between them, was important to the participants as it indicated a level of trust which was embedded in the relationship. Field (2004) (2.3.3) has also raised this issue within social capital where individuals would know that where they would not be 'exploited', they would expect a benefit in return either immediately or in the future. This was how Paul had described a member of his network that he referred to as his "*working mum*" (pg. 147) because he trusted her and knew that there was a mutuality between them; each knew they could rely on each other for support.

These narratives were demonstrating the positive outcome of the reciprocity and trust between the participants and their networks. Where the reciprocity was not present in the interactions, the level of trust within the relationships was low and this resulted in either resentment or being guarded in their conversations. Julie had described this 'guarded' nature with members of her department, who, despite seeming friendly had "*a book*" (pg. 169) which they would use to record conversations. This had led Julie to keeping a professional distance between them. Equally, Sam had expressed her resentment in her relationships with her Head Teacher, with whom she explained she had tried to have a reciprocal relationship. However, she felt "*thwarted*" (pg. 194) because her contributions were ignored by the Head: "*I feel like nothing that I did previously is recognised*" (pg. 195) and that despite assurances opportunities would be made available to her, this had not been forthcoming. This position in Sam's interpretations of her experience is reflective of what Field (2004) (2.3.3) had suggested around being 'exploited' in relationships and the damage this does to the level of trust between the individuals.

Access to Resources and Benefits

In 2.3.3, Lin (2011) describes social capital as 'an investment in social relations with expected returns'. In the previous section on 'Reciprocity and Trust' the participants were able to see how their investments in their relationships saw positive outcomes through the level of trust which developed. In a related theme, the reciprocity within the relationships also provides access to resources and other benefits, such as advice or privileged information as suggested by Portes (1998) (2.3.3). Both Paul and Julie had described their access to material resources, such as musical instruments or

specialist scientific equipment, that their schools were not able to financially resource themselves. A consistent feature across the narratives of the participants was the frequency of sharing, and one aspect of this was for teaching resources, such as worksheets or curriculum plans. Paul described this in his relationship with a teacher in a neighbouring school: *"...just trying to cut down on workload...we pretty much do the same lessons"* (pg. 153). The use of the networks as a way of accessing resources to reduce or manage workload challenges was reflected in Peter and Matt's narratives when they would meet up with ex-colleagues and would share lesson specific ideas and features.

The sharing of curriculum resources and challenges had been a motivator for the formation of the curriculum support groups that Matt, Julie, Linda, and Sam had described in their interviews. The intention of joining forces for the purposes of collaboration featured in the discussion in 2.2.3 around PLCs. At a practical level, the sharing was as Paul described, about tackling workload but also, as Linda had suggested, a way of *"using other people's expertise. Why re-invent the wheel?"* (pg. 187). However, another feature through the access to resources and benefits through the PLCs was to be able gain support, advice, and access to information that the participants would be excluded from or find difficult to access. One example of this was in the access to exam board information and being able to discuss issues directly that otherwise they may have been unable to secure from an individual perspective: *"we got them all in [exam boards] to talk to us when the syllabus was changing..."* (pg. 168) was Julie's experience and Matt explained that *"...it's more powerful than individual schools doing it and we might get listened to"* (pg. 178). The power in numbers was important for Julie and Matt and through the commercial interest of the

exam boards being able to have an audience of several schools in one presentation, they were symbiotic interests for investing the time in the process.

As well as using the PLCs to access a wider resource for sharing and gaining advice, some of the participants had also explained that their relationships also enabled them to access privileged information which could be useful in the future. One aspect of this was through understanding the policies and positions which other schools had taken towards global school issues, such as marking, behaviour, or assessment. Peter explained this was a common conversation on his commute or during sporting events, Matt had also described this situation when he met socially with friends who were also teachers. Anna had also described accessing privileged information, not from the perspective of other schools, but within her own school. She had described her relationships and meetings with the Senior Team as a way to access information and develop her own knowledge with the intention of developing her career: *"I've got the chance to learn something completely new and quite big..."* (pg. 145). Anna had been open about her desire to move her career into senior leadership and therefore, she had felt that through investing in these relationships and volunteering for activities, this would give her a visibility of projects happening within school that she could contribute to: *"...(it's) the conversations that come afterwards"* (pg. 145). This use of an individual's networks was one of the ways Erickson (2008) (2.3.3) had suggested people in management use their networks for progression. This aspect of social capital in the participants' networks leads into the third theme from the narratives of Career Progression.

Career Progression

At the end of the previous section on 'Access to Resources and Benefits' I discussed one aspect of Anna's narrative which involved the use of her social capital to gain access to resources and benefits for the purpose of her career progression. The use of the social network for this purpose featured significantly in the literature, especially around gaining insider information relating to upcoming positions, gaining introductions into organisations, or to widen their networks for the purpose of increasing opportunities which was highlighted by Lin (2011) (2.3.3). This aspect of the use of social capital is reflected in Burt (2008) (2.3.3) where there was suggestion that social capital has become a metaphor for advantage because individuals are able to gain access to more prominent positions at work or take the lead of important projects. This is reflective in how Anna had described her use of her relationships within the senior leadership team. By cultivating and showing willing to take on projects and roles, she hoped this would lead to further opportunities as she worked her way towards a senior leader role. Matt had also described similar thoughts, albeit in a much earlier stage of his career, as he recognised the significance for the future by investing in positive relationships with his senior leadership team: *so "I'm not saying I don't sometimes try and cultivate relationships for those types of reasons but it's not necessarily...the driving force"* (pg. 183). Matt was emphasising that he considered the building of his network was from a support perspective, but that he recognised the benefits that his access to the senior leaders through his work as a governor and being positive about the future focus of his school would be advantageous to him.

Whilst Anna and Matt were discussing how they felt they could use their networks for the possibility of future development, Julie, in contrast, had been identified within her network as a potential leader. For this reason, Julie had described her career progression as *“by circumstance”* (pg. 171) where she suggested that had she not been encouraged by her own Head of Department earlier in her teaching to apply for promotion, it may not have been something she would have considered at the time. Erickson (2008) (2.3.3) explored this in the context of leaders identifying features or benefits to their own organisations through the promotion of individuals they considered would be advantageous. This had been something which Sam had expressed frustration about in her narrative because *“...I was told there would be opportunities; there aren’t...”* (pg. 202). Sam had considered herself to be in a comparable situation to Julie, in that she felt she had been identified as someone who was considered as advantageous to the school and whose knowledge and expertise was respected. However, she felt that she had been manipulated or *“thwarted”* because her anticipation of the opportunities which would be available to her did not align with intentions of the organisation that she had joined. Sam’s reflections on this were interesting because she identified herself that it was the collective of people within her network which had resulted in her inability to gain access to leading or collaborating in larger whole school projects that she was hoping to do: *“waiting for the right thing to come along”* (pg. 202). This narrative from Sam differs from other participants, in that, Sam is describing in considerable detail aspects of social control embedded within social capital, by Field (2004) (2.3.3) who describes it as the ‘darker side’ of social capital which are drawn on in greater detail in the next theme ‘Social Control’.

The resulting action from Sam of the situation, where she felt that opportunities were been withheld from her, was to expand her network through the social media platform Twitter. In 5.2.2, Sam's action of using Twitter as way to counteract the negative influences of feeling "*thwarted*" was aligned with the theme of 'Access to Expertise and Resources' where she says: "*I just think 'bloody hell' I can have conversations with, you know, Senior Minister's Advisors and then I can't get a Senior Leadership position around here*" (pg. 202). She felt her intention to increase her contacts had been successful, but the possibility of accessing opportunities continued to elude her. She expressed her frustrations because her interactions had exposed her to communication with school leaders and advisers which had not translated into a greater recognition with her school. However, she explained her continued drive and approach was "*...if this person's not listening or this person's not listening, I will go and find someone who does...*" (pg. 200). This action by Sam is suggestive of a sense of agency and belief in her ability which is explored more in the 5.4.

Social Control and Exclusion

In 2.3.3, where I explored social capital theory, it was suggested by Portes (1998) that one element of social capital was that of social control. Within the literature, there is a sense of the benefits from membership of networks and groups as creating a 'trustworthiness', for example Coleman (1988), where he suggests that individuals are in stronger positions through their membership and access within social groups. This beneficial perspective was explored in the previous sections of Access to Resources and Benefits, and Career Progression. However, in this section the same groups and networks are considered but from the perspective of the limitations to free-speech

and new ideas which Baker & Faulkner (2009) highlighted in 2.3.3 and Granovetter (1973) suggested could result in a conformity through fear of exclusion.

Sam featured significantly in the previous section as she described, through her narrative, specific instances, and experiences where she had felt controlled and manipulated within her networks. She had used frequently the word *"thwarted"* to describe way she felt about her career progression and felt that she had been controlled and manipulated, as suggested by Field (2004) (2.3.3), because *"I was told there would opportunities; there aren't"* (pg. 202). She felt she had committed to her role with school and would be afforded the opportunities to be involved in areas she was interested in, however, she was now trapped *"with a mortgage to pay"* (pg. 202) and ignored within her workplace, described by *"this person's not listening"* (pg. 200). This reflects the position of Baker & Faulkner (2009) (2.3.3) and the limitation of free speech. Sam considered this to be due to the *"policy driven"* (pg. 199) management structure of the MAT, which was performance focused and driven by a replication of the way they wanted their schools to follow *"the way (they've) established it"* (pg. 199). Sam's observations and interpretations of her experiences within her MAT are reflective of Bourdieu (1980) (2.3.2) and role of *habitus* and the cultural norms which are present in the reproduction of cultural knowledge within groups.

Paul had also felt 'controlled' within his school where he described a period of bullying and intimidation by a member of the senior team. He felt that he had been *"undermined in every circumstance"* (pg. 149) and as a result had needed to take leave due to stress and ill health. Fast, Burris and Bartel (2014) (2.3.3) suggest that managers with low self-efficacy can exclude those who challenge their own perspectives or their

beliefs in their ability. Paul explained how he was required to attend a professional development course. Whilst this was presented as supportive, it resulted in a mistrust within some of the relationships in his network. The experience had increased his motivation to leave the profession, and this is explored further in the next section in the context of agency, however he felt that he was trapped for similar reasons to Sam, in that, the financial need to support his family meant he could not easily leave due to the vulnerable nature of music teaching and the relatively unpopulated area of the geographical research area. Granovetter (1973) had suggested that the fear of exclusion can lead to conformity and the experience of Paul and the outcomes of this are reflective of this position where he described some of his relationships were *“jumping through hoops”* (pg. 155).

Sam had also been suggestive of this in her descriptions of her relationship with the senior members of her MAT. Like Paul, she considered certain conversations within her role to be merely nodding as there was no opportunity for discussion. This asymmetrical nature of the relationships, as described by Breiger (1988) (2.2.2), means there is an imbalance in the mutuality of the power dynamics between them. This results in a need to conform and accept the judgements without challenge because, as Granovetter (1973) (2.3.3) suggested, this could result in exclusion as both Sam and Paul explained they had financial obligations which they did not want to put at risk. These narratives from Sam and Paul were the only specific examples of the control and exclusion described by the participants. Linda and Sam had expressed frustration with a lack of dialogue within the profession, which Linda felt was the result of *“competitiveness”* (pg. 187) between schools and which Sam described as schools

being *“inward-looking...and don’t want their best stuff going elsewhere”* (pg. 201), which suggests a reluctance to engage with discussion to enable change. However, Linda’s frustration and cynicism were focused more on a structural level than a relational one. She had hinted that in the past her need to meet her financial obligations had been a significant driver in her decision to remain in the profession and was becoming less significant as she moved into the later phases of her career. The reason this is important is the lack of evidence across the narratives of this aspect of social control and exclusion does not mean that it is not present within the contexts of the other participants. As suggested in 3.3.1.1, where I discuss the risk of professional harm to the participants, there is the possibility of participants not wanting to openly disclose areas of conflict or, as suggested by Reason (1999) (3.6) of participants ‘fooling themselves’ through their responses in the interview discussion.

Peter had raised this point in his narrative, not relating to himself, but to other teachers when he suggested that his colleagues *“aren’t daft”* (pg. 159) in the context of having open discussions in forums which are visible to senior leaders, for example. Through recognising, within the narratives across all the participants, the value they place on their trusted relationships. This is because of their ability to have conversations about their challenges, or talk freely without the risk of repercussions, that across all the participants there is a conformity which exists within all their networks to avoid the exclusion, suggested by Granovetter (1973) and gain access to the benefits which come from their membership to various social groups and inner circles, as described by Lin (2011) (2.3.3).

The importance of this aspect of social capital is, as described by Cross et al. (2001) (2.2.3), the value of the knowledge which people bring with them to their workplaces on a day-to-day basis. As suggested by Keshavarz et al. (2010) (2.3.3) schools are 'complex adaptive workplaces', this means that to adapt they need to be open to new ideas and to innovation. Archer's (2010) (2.4.2) description of morphogenesis and the structural elaboration which results, represents the 'complex adaptation' as described by Keshavarez et al. (2010) above. Archer (2010) (2.4.2) suggests that without this adaptation and innovation, the outcome is morphostasis and stability of the status quo. In 2.6.3, Byrne and Callaghan (2014), suggest that adaptivity is a basis for resilience, which would suggest the knowledge which individuals bring with them on a day-to-day basis provide the foundations for the 'adaptive capacity' (ibid.) suggested. This means that excluding this knowledge through the control of the dialogue between the staff could limit the opportunities for development and knowledge exchanges. This experience was present within Sam's narrative where she described feeling *"...they say they want middle leaders to have autonomy...but it's just lip service...in meetings we're just talked at"* (pg. 194) Linda was also frustrated at the lack of professional dialogue when she described her experiences with PLCs and the lack of change: *"...there is a sense of collegiality ...where does it go?"* (pg. 187).

In 4.10, I highlighted the distinctions across the participants in terms of their career phases where Linda and Sam represent the 'veteran' teachers as described by Day and Gu (2010). Linda and Sam, in comparison to the other teachers who would be considered 'mid-career' (Day and Gu, 2010), were the most frustrated at the lack of professional dialogue and within their experiences, they felt they had limited

opportunities to contribute to this. I move my discussion into the final area of capital, in my exploration around the nature of the exchanges in the participants' networks, and consider that of professional capital as described by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) (2.3.4)

5.3.4 Professional Capital

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) described professional capital as being the combined constructs across human, social, and decisional capitals. In this chapter I have explored the presence of human and social capitals within the exchanges in the participants' networks, however, in this section of the discussion this will look at the ways the participants were able to use these capitals in a way that enables their decisional capital. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) (2.3.4) describe this as the ability to make decisions in complex situations and they point to this being gained through experience and reflective practice over time. I consider this position to have significant overlap with the discussion around agency, which is explored in 5.4, however, the distinction here is that agency considers the ways in which the participants feel a sense of control and an ability to enact change, whereas professional capital explores the ways the participants can draw on their relationships to develop their professional practice.

In 5.3.1, I discussed the aspects of human capital which were present within the narratives of the participants. These revolved around the ways the participants used their networks for knowledge exchange and there was a repeated reference to the level of sharing within the interactions. In 2.3.4, where I reviewed the position of Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) on professional capital, I had interpreted their inclusion of human capital to be representative of knowledge rather than as 'talent' which they

had suggested. This was evident across the participants in the ways in which they extracted and exchanged knowledge through their sharing of expertise and resources. Also, there was evidence of the use of experiential knowledge, for example in Peter's narrative, where he discussed the impact of his previous career and the ways in which he was able to use this in his role as a Pastoral Lead. He also suggested his age influenced the ways colleagues gave more credibility to his judgements rather than younger colleagues who had more teaching experience. His age and experience meant he considered himself *"not quite as frightened as (he) was when (he) was younger"* (pg. 163) and this belief in his abilities meant that he was *"not worried about making (his) feelings known"* (pg. 163). In 2.4.1, Bandura (2000) suggested that beliefs of an individual's ability to enact change were influential to their self-efficacy and across Peter's narrative, he was suggestive of this belief in his own efficacy. In 4.4, I had reflected that Peter's observations, and interpretations here made me consider Paul's experiences and wonder if his age had contributed to his experience of bullying from a senior colleague. Paul's experience resulted in him feeling marginalised and frustrated and this impacted on his belief in his abilities in his role where he said, *"it was making me feel I couldn't do my job"* (pg. 149). This distinction between the experiences of Peter and Paul are significant because they demonstrate the ways in which the relationships between workplace colleagues can influence the self-efficacy described by Bandura (2000). When considering professional capital, it is the experience that individuals use and draw from when making professional judgements and decisions that are significant. Paul had received the support of his headteacher, and this experience meant he felt able to *"go higher to get something done"* (pg. 150). This appears to suggest that he can make those professional judgements when to call

something out and not accept situations where he does not agree. The need to conform, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) (2.3.4) said, negated the impact of decisional capital and teachers would be unable to exercise their own judgements.

The inability to exercise their professional judgements were evident in Sam and Linda's narratives, discussed in 5.3.3 on Social Control and Exclusion. Sam had reported instances where she felt opportunities to act on her professional capacities were no more than *"lip service"* (pg. 194) from a management structure, which she felt was much more orientated towards *"scrutiny"* (pg. 201) and *"policy driven practices"* (pg. 199) rather than allowing middle leaders the autonomy to act on their professional knowledge. This, Sam said, was evident by her judgement being limited to *"selecting the colour of exercise books"* (pg. 195) rather than building on her strategic knowledge and it was the resulting *"not feeling fulfilled"* (pg. 195) which had driven her move to Twitter to find conversations and networks she felt she could contribute to. In 5.3.3, I discussed the differences between the narratives of Linda and Sam to the other participants and highlighted the work of Day and Gu (2010) in their explorations of the different challenges and transitions of teachers in various career phases. Across the narratives from Linda and Sam, both classified as veteran teachers, there is a cynicism and frustration which I would consider in my interpretations would come from being experienced within teaching for the longest. This comparison is the most obvious when considering the narratives of Anna and Julie. Both participants had been in teaching for around 20 years and, in the case of Anna, was trying to move into senior leadership, and Julie had only recently made that first step. Neither Anna or Julie expressed specific instances of frustration at the lack of opportunity to engage in

professional dialogue or judgement with their senior team. Instead, they both expressed their use of the senior team for development with their own professional knowledge. Anna, for example, had expressed how she used her meetings with the senior team “*to stretch (herself)*” (pg. 142) and Julie had discussed the importance of her relationship and proximity to working with more senior colleagues as she could access their advice and knowledge. These reflections of Anna and Julie are interesting because their use of their senior colleagues for advice and development of knowledge would suggest a reproduction of practices and cultures, which for Bourdieu (1993) (2.3.2) was embedded with cultural capital. This could result in an uncritical acceptance of the values and practices, rather than a challenge to cultural norms with their schools. This repetition of collective actions and dispositions is how Bourdieu (1980) described his position of *habitus*. Anna and Julie are experiencing the benefits of this collective action as they build positive relations with their senior teams; however, Sam and Linda are experiencing a fracture through their challenges of the cultural practices taking place. In 5.3.2, in the context of gaining access to exclusive cliques, I discussed Anna’s shared hobby with a member of her senior team and how this resulted in her being able to “*break down the barriers*” (pg. 143) to engaging in professional dialogue. This would indicate, through Anna’s ability to access the senior team, she is using her cultural capital to engage with the development in her professional capital. This is important because, in 5.3.3 around Social Control and Exclusion, Anna is displaying the attributes of those who are chosen because, as described by Fast, Burris and Bartel (2014) (2.3.3), managers will cultivate relationships with those who agree with their own positions. Therefore, this culturally advantageous position of Anna is having a significant impact on her social and

decisional capitals and for this reason, I wonder why cultural capital was not also considered within professional capital.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) (2.3.4) suggested decisional capital is 'mediated' through social relations with colleagues. Like Anna and Julie, both Matt and Peter also discussed the value they placed on their more experienced colleagues, whom they would seek out for advice around issues such as curriculum or students. Both Matt and Peter had changed careers and therefore, could draw on their professional knowledge of their previous careers whilst also recognising when they needed to seek further guidance from those around them. Matt had explained he had chosen to become a school governor to widen his knowledge around educational issues and practices and this was part of "*having an eye on*" (pg. 182) his future career progression. Therefore, like Anna and Julie, Matt was also using the experiences and knowledge of senior colleagues in a way to develop his own professional capital.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) (2.3.4) suggest teachers who spend most of their time isolated from colleagues and do not engage in dialogue across schools will have limited capacity for the development of their professional capital because they will have limited opportunities for discussion and feedback. They suggest the wider the 'network of influence and opportunity' the more there develops a resilience through gaining 'advocates' who people can go to for advice. This aspect of the social within professional capital is present within the networks, whether this be from the position of positive development or from the negative perspective of exclusion. These will be important aspects of the participants narratives around agency in 5.4 and resilience in

5.5, where I draw on how the professional capitals of the participants influence their motivations and commitments in the next sections.

5.3.5 Response to the Research Question

This second research question was seeking to understand the ways the participants used their network contacts and what the nature of the exchanges were. I decided to use the constructs of capital to help me explore these exchanges as way to understand their transactional values rather than focus on the content specifically.

Across all the participants, most of the conversations and interactions across their networks and relationships were focused on the exchange and extraction of knowledge. This gain from the perspective of human capitals, suggested as the knowledge, skills, and attributes an individual possesses, was around ideas of practice and pedagogy or physical resources such as curriculum materials. These exchanges would take place across their entire networks, and as suggested by Granovetter (1973) (2.3.3), the overlap of social circles allows the flow of information from one setting into another. This sharing, and the extent to which it is evident within the narratives of the participants, suggests a lack of criticality towards the reproduction of the knowledge. This, I would suggest, is because the sharing is to reduce workload or provide collegial support, through sharing policies and practices, as the participants navigated the curriculum changes and the developments in the OFSTED frameworks for inspection. I reflect on this more in chapter 6, where I consider there would be much to gain in our understanding of the influence networks and how social exchanges impact the complex adaptive nature of schooling.

The exchanges across the participants' network demonstrate the ways in which cultural knowledge was reproduced and the advantages this brought for many of the participants. I considered this aspect of the networks to represent the embodied and objectified aspects of cultural capital. Whilst the mechanisms of exchanges demonstrated the extent to which knowledge was exchanged and reproduced across wide networks, it was also evident participants were taking advantage of their knowledge and positions to gain in status or access further opportunities. Matt, for example, in his decision to become a school governor increases his capital capacity by gaining in knowledge of the education system, which provides a cultural advantage as he has access to privileged information and is influential in the decisions made at a strategic level. This was also with an eye to raising his visibility and accessing exclusive cliques which he recognised could become useful in the future. Anna had similarly invested her time with her senior team through developing the relationships and extracting knowledge around practices and processes to engage in dialogue with them. Like Matt, this was with an eye towards her career progression.

In contrast, there was evidence in the narratives of the exclusion of those who do not share the values or practices which are espoused within their schools. Whilst social capital can be used as a metaphor for advantage and success, as the participants used their connections to access resources and benefits across the wide networks, there was evidence of the 'darker side' of social capital, as suggested by Field (2004) (2.3.3). This darker side involves the silencing of individuals, and the social exclusion and isolation which results. Within the narratives there was the suggestion of the participants being selective over the nature of their discussions in different forums. As Peter suggested "*people aren't daft*" (pg. 159), despite Hargreaves and Fullan (2012)

(2.3.4) suggesting teachers' professional capital is negated when they conform to practices due to fear or to an eye on the future. The decision to keep views on management and Trust level policies within closed and trusting relationships demonstrate the strategic positions the participants were taking in their roles.

The presence of the PLC and CoPs (5.2.2) was evident from the experiences of the participants and the narratives indicated a range of experiences. These experiences resonated with the literature and therefore, there was both a sense of collaboration and strategic influence, highlighted by Hord (2004) (2.2.3), whilst also suggestive of the frustrations around the lack of change they were able to deliver and the dissonance, described by Watson (2018) (2.2.3), between their intentions and the reality. Despite the polarised view across the participants, the presence of the learning communities was evident, whether this was through formalised consortiums, on-line communities, or informal collaborations between colleagues, the communities provided opportunities to foster relationships, gain access to specialist equipment and advice, and to share resources to such an extent they could be considered a form of currency in themselves.

The ways in which the participants used their networks and relationships gave them emotional support, through their reciprocal and trusting relationships, and provided opportunities for professional development. The nature of the interactions was also influential on how they considered themselves to be able to enact change and the level of control they felt they were able to exercise over their professional lives. I consider this from the position of agency in response to the next research question.

5.4 Research Question Three

How do the interactions within the networks influence the middle leaders' sense of agency in their roles?

In 2.4 I explored the literature on agency with an aim to understand the dynamics across this construct. Within the literature there was a suggestion from Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2016) that agency is a 'slippery and much contested term'. However, through the positions of Archer (2010) and Bandura (1989), as well as Emirbayer and Mische (1998), I have taken agency to be: *the combined belief and motivational system in which someone can enact change and respond to change through a preparedness of it* (2.4.1, pg. 47). The aim of this third research question is to consider how the interactions of the participants in their networks influence their ability to feel agentic. Therefore, I begin with an exploration around individual agency, before I consider the collective nature of Teacher Agency, as suggested by Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2016) (2.4.3) and conclude with a discussion of the impacts of agency on the mental health of the participants.

5.4.1 Individual Agency

In 2.4.1, Bandura (1989) suggests that self-efficacy makes a significant contribution to an individual's sense of agency. Through belief in their ability to enact change, people can have a sense of control over their lives. Peter's narrative was suggestive of this as his experiences in his previous career gave him a sense of control and authority in his role, despite being in teaching for only a few years. In 5.3.4, I considered this from the perspective of his professional capital and the way he was able to make decisions and exercise professional judgements. However, in the context of agency, this professional

capital is also considered through his reflexivity. Archer (2010) (2.4.1) suggests that reflexive positions evolve from reflections of the past to inform the future. This reflexive position from Peter is suggested when he claims “*(he) isn’t as frightened*” (pg. 163) to speak his mind in the same way he was when he was younger. However, he also considers the way his colleagues use his experiences to inform their discussions is also influential on the way he feels about his efficacy in his role. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) (2.4.1) posit the influence the environment has on agency and Archer (2010) considers the culture and structure of the environment to enable or restrict an individual’s agency. This meant that, for Peter, the response from his colleagues, which he observed “*amusing to watch*” (pg. 163), afforded him a respect that was not present with those who were younger yet more experienced in teaching. Sam’s experience, however, was not the same. Despite being similar in age to Peter, Sam had considerably more experience in teaching, yet found this had been disregarded, which she thought to be due to a conflict with the “*regimented*” (pg. 196) processes within her school. This would be suggestive of morphostatic conditions (2.4.2) where there is an emphasis on reproduction of knowledge and maintaining social order. The impact of this is discussed more in 5.4.3, however the absence of being afforded the opportunity to exercise her own agency within her role meant she shifted her focus to develop her relationships within the wider educational community on Twitter. Bandura (1989) (2.4.1) suggests that individuals need to have a ‘robust’ efficacy to sustain and persevere in the face of obstacles. Peter’s career change to become a teacher was to fulfil an ambition, and his financial security allowed him to approach his career differently to Sam. Peter was embracing the wider aspects of school life and was active with extra-curricular activities and events. These

opportunities combined with the support of his colleagues gave Peter a sense of control over his working life. Sam's aim was to move into senior leadership, and she felt "*thwarted*" by what she perceived as the constant barriers that were put in her way. However, her belief that she could contribute to issues within education, where Bandura (2001) (2.4.1) says that agency is a combined belief and structural system, meant she recognised she needed to adapt to her structural constraints to take control.

This commitment to her belief system whilst adapting to the contextual situation was also part of Anna's narrative. Anna was also committed to a move to senior leadership however had not been successful in her applications. Like Sam, Anna recognised the need to remain committed in her belief that she could contribute and would be successful. However, the relationships within her school with the senior leadership team were positive. Therefore, Anna was using these to develop her knowledge of wider school issues and to gain access to opportunities where she hoped she would be able to demonstrate her capabilities. This was explored in 5.3.3 and the way social capital influenced the participants use of their networks. In the context of agency, in 2.4.1, I suggested that agency was an ability to enact change but also to respond to change. Both Anna and Sam's sense of agency indicated the way they were responding to their situations in the hope of achieving their aims. The difference though, is Anna had positive relationships which she felt she could develop. This was not the same in Sam's narrative and therefore, she responded by seeking out new relationships and opportunities.

Across all the narratives, there was a sense of the significance the role that relationships had for enabling agency or restricting it. These relationships form part of the situational and structural contexts which Archer (2010) (2.4.1) suggests influence the sense of agency a person has. I drew from this that people can exercise varying levels of agency across their lives and this is apparent in the three narratives I have explored here. Where there are restrictions or barriers, the participants' ability to be agentic, that is, a belief they can enact change, allows them to adjust and adapt to the circumstances. Their motivations and beliefs in their own abilities continue to drive them forward and where there are no barriers, they can feel a sense of control over their lives. This intertwining of agency and structural factors reflects Archer's (2010) (2.4.2) consideration around morphogenesis. Morphogenetic outcomes result in adaptation and transformations and occur where there is a break away from the status quo (Archer, 2017) (2.4.2). The individual agency explored here for Peter, Sam, and Anna resonates with this as they have drawn from their beliefs and motivations as drivers for generating change. This is explored further in 5.5 where I discuss the impacts on resilience for the participants.

5.4.2 Teacher (Collective) Agency

When considering Teacher Agency, Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2016) (2.4.3), consider teacher agency as a 'phenomenon'. This means teacher agency is explored through what is observable about the actions of teachers in the context of the school structures and educational policies within which they work. Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2016) suggest that the agency of teachers depends upon the 'relational resources' they have access to. Whilst there is a discussion around the need for

teacher autonomy, Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2016) do not consider this be a useful solution to the potential crisis within education of falling teacher numbers and incidences of stress and burnout. The focus, rather, should be on what ‘help or hindrance’ is present in the context of teachers’ everyday lives. Therefore, I consider these aspects of teacher agency here in the context of my participants’ narratives.

Personal and Departmental Relationships

Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2016) (2.4.3) suggest that agency is influenced by the relational resources available. Across the participants’ networks, they have a range of relationships (5.2.1) across their personal and professional lives, where they have access to resources which provide emotional support or expertise, and they can gain access to privileged information and platforms which provide opportunities for professional development (5.2.2). In the context of agency and the way a person believes they can take control and enact change can be driven by the nature of the relationships they exist within. Linda had expressed feeling isolated, with little support available to her, and had as a result become very self-reliant in her role. This was a danger, described by Driscoll (2013) (2.6.2), in the context of considering resilience at an individual level and the risk of self-reliance and isolation. Matt, on the other hand, expressed his appreciation of his department colleagues who all “*mucked in*” (pg. 174) and he drew from their advice and knowledge as he built his own professional capacity in his role. Anna described her department as “*interwoven*” (pg. 138) where each member had a particular strength which they all drew from. In contrast to Linda, who felt she had little opportunity to talk to other colleagues, Matt and Anna had described shared department space, which offered many opportunities to talk about curriculum

and student issues. Proximity of working was highlighted by Borgatti and Ofem (2015) (2.2.2) as a key factor for building relations, and reciprocity and symmetry in the relations resulted in a collegiate atmosphere in schools, as concluded by Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2016) (2.4.3).

The use of workspace for creating good working relations was also present in the narratives of Julie and Paul, who both shared offices outside of their departments, and appreciated the availability of professional conversations. The opportunity to talk about work and engage in dialogue around curriculum and policy, was highlighted by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) (2.4.3) as important factors in the way teachers felt a sense of belonging in their work. The sense of belonging was a key factor for Sam and Matt. Sam's community on Twitter she described as "*my type*" (pg. 200) and Matt felt he had found a school he wanted to invest in because their values were aligned. Erickson (1988) (2.2.2) suggests that people gain reassurance when they are in company of others who share their views. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) (2.4.3) refer to a 'contextual dissonance' where there is a disconnect in how people feel they connect with their workplaces.

All the participants were committed to their students and providing the best quality of educational experience to them. The relationships Paul had with the students were particularly important in the way he viewed his role and his motivation within it. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) (2.4.1) suggest that agency is present in the moment and Paul drew his agency from these relationships as he wanted to instil a love of music in his students and engage with them in their appreciation of it. "*I will miss the kids...but I won't miss the bullshit...*" (pg. 191) was how Linda reflected on her decision

to leave teaching. This 'call to serve' is a strong motivator for entering and remaining in the profession (Woolfolk-Hoy, 2008) (2.4.3) however, Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2016) suggest this can become eroded through the systems of accountability. In 5.4.3, I discuss in more detail the impact of, what Woolfolk-Hoy (2008) (2.4.3) describes as 'serving or surviving' however I now move the discussion to consider the impact relationships with senior leaders has for the participants' agency.

Senior Leader Relationships

In 2.6.2 Day and Gu (2010) argue that school leaders are the 'creators and guardians' of the school culture. Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2016) (2.4.3) highlight the way the ethos and atmosphere within a school are influenced by the reciprocity and symmetry which exist within the relationships. In the participants' narratives, reciprocity and symmetry existed within their close relationships; those with a high degree of trust, respect, and confidentiality (5.2.2). Therefore, there was an asymmetric tie between the participants and their senior teams, where the interactions would be, as Anna described "*a fixed arrangement*" (pg. 142), scheduled and pre-arranged. In 5.2.2, I suggested there was an imbalance, either through power or knowledge, between the participants and their senior leaders and this echoes the discussion from Breiger (1998) (2.2.2) around the equivalency in relationships. This asymmetrical nature of the relationships is important in the context of agency because the participants' feeling of control and being able to enact change can be empowered or restricted within these relationships.

Matt, for example, recognised that he would only approach his senior team with a particular agenda however, he considered the conversations would be “*very open...honest...*” (pg. 175). This would suggest Matt felt he would receive an open discussion and his views would be respected. Paul was also suggestive of this with his relationship with the head teacher. He considered there to be a mutuality between them, and this gave Paul a sense that his concerns would be understood: “*they know all the extra-curricular stuff, so I feel like they listen very well*” (pg. 150). The belief that they would be heard was an important feature in the narratives here. Whilst Paul and Matt recognised that they would need the support and authorisation from the senior leaders to enact the changes they were suggesting, knowing they could contribute to an open discussion was significant in the way they perceived their own agency.

Recognising agency as not just enacting on change, but also being able to argue the case for it, knowing that their views and values would be respected is significant. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) (2.4.3) suggest that feeling connected within their teaching environments is an important aspect of a teacher’s agency. Anna’s relationships with her senior team were highlighted in 5.4.1 as an opportunity for her to display her agency and to try to gain access to new opportunities. Julie’s sense of agency had been enhanced by the encouragement of her line managers and senior leaders, which had resulted in her move through a variety of leadership roles. This was discussed in 5.3.3 in the way social capital influences the outcomes for individuals. However, in the context of agency this support and belief in her abilities from her senior team gave Julie a greater sense of her capabilities and this had driven her to apply for her assistant head role because she felt “*I could do that job much better*” (pg. 171).

The knowledge of supportive relationships with the senior leaders in their schools was important. Paul mentioned the importance of “*praise*” (pg. 154) helped to mitigate some of the challenges of running a department and working closely with department colleagues. However, there is a danger here concerning workload and expectations on staff, especially those such as Paul where there is an onus on them for extra-curricular activities. I discussed this in 1.5 around the construct of resilience; that there is a danger that too much emphasis is placed on individuals to manage, without consideration for the workplace cultures that are being created around it. Day and Gu (2010) (2.6.2) argue that school leaders are the ‘creators and guardians’ of the workplace culture and whilst it is laudable that Paul feels he has got an appreciation from his Head Teacher, it is also possible from his decision to reduce his working week that he could be unable to manage the expectations of him from the school on a full-time basis.

In 1.4, middle leaders were described as the bridge from the school leaders to the classroom teachers. However, in 5.2.2, I discussed how the middle leaders, through the level of symmetry and reciprocity within departmental relations, were much closer in the hierarchy to classroom practice than they were to the strategic decisions made within senior leadership teams. This means a recognition from the senior leaders of the challenges of middle leadership played a key factor in how the participants considered the importance of their role. All the participants who were department leads had conversations with their senior team around issues which involved specific curricula challenges. For example, Paul, as expressed previously, knowing his head teacher understood the extra-curricular demands of the being the music lead was

enabling for him. However, Linda had felt the lack of awareness around the demands of the IT curriculum caused her problems with timetabling that her senior team did not understand. In contrast, Peter and his senior team worked collaboratively on the pastoral issues of the students and as a result, there was more symmetry of power and knowledge between them as they collectively found solutions and I interpreted this as a fundamental difference between the pastoral and departmental roles.

One of the ways school leaders mitigate the issues around curriculum challenges is the promotion of professional learning communities to enable collaboration and professional development (2.2.3). Therefore, I now consider the role of these communities on the agency of the participants.

Professional Learning Communities

In 2.2.3, Adams (2000) suggests that formal communities of teachers come together through school collaborations and partnerships which have a specific focus or agenda. There are also more informal communities which result through the socialisation of teachers (McCormick et al., 2010). In this discussion I am going to focus on the PLCs which the participants attend rather than consider the informal CoPs and activities as these have already been explored in the context of agency in 'Personal and Departmental Relationships'.

There are four participants in my study who discussed in detail the role the PLCs they attended, and these are the narratives I will discuss here. Before I begin it is interesting to me that there is a polarised opinion across the four participants which I will explore through the experiences of the participants. Both Matt and Julie were positive about the PLCs they attended and the impact these had. In contrast, Linda and Sam were not

as enthused and I discussed in 4.10 how, as the teachers who had been in teaching the longest, their narratives offered the most cynicism in comparison to the others. This is interesting to explore as Day and Gu (2010) (3.4.1) suggest that teachers in different career phases often have different challenges and therefore different outlooks.

At the time of interview, the PLCs of the participants were focused on the curriculum and assessment changes that were taking place in England. Watson (2014) (2.2.3) suggests that these communities have become a common feature in schools and for my participants the communities were across schools within regional areas and were curriculum focused. Both Matt and Julie were positive about the impacts the PLCs, which was focused on the ability to share resources and discuss issues with those who understand and are experiencing the same the pressures. Hord (2004) (2.2.3) suggests that one of the intentions of the communities is for shared leadership that encourages teachers to be involved in the decision-making processes. Therefore, one of the intentions of the group is to enable agency and Julie describes the focus of the group as *"looking for a way forward"* (pg. 167) in the context of the planned changes. In 5.3.1 the use of the PLCs was explored in the context of Human Capital and the extent to knowledge exchange and sharing. These features continue to be important here, as the reproduction of the knowledge within the groups was providing a support mechanism through, what Matt describes as, *"comfort"* (pg. 176) from knowing there are others who agree.

Matt had suggested that smaller schools in his region benefitted from the group. This was present in Julie's narrative as she felt that access to the groups enabled her ability

to offer more activities to her students because they were able to join in with other larger schools in the area. These interpretations from Matt and Julie are important as they reflect the findings on Teacher Agency by Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2016) (2.4.3) on the impact of 'relational resources' and the way teachers come together to collectively bring about change. When considering agency from a collective perspective, one of the significant findings of my study is not only the extent of sharing but the impact access to these resources has. I reflect on the significance of this in 5.2.2, but here in the context of agency I consider it from the perspective of enacting change. Both Matt and Julie describe how they have drawn a considerable amount of agency through their participation and access to resources from their PLCs and in 5.3.4 this was explored from the position of their profession capital. The access to resources and collective agency was a driver for all the member schools to use the same examination provider. Matt explained that the power in numbers as a Federation rather than as individual schools, he felt, might strengthen their influence in the discussions with the exam boards: "*we might get listened to*" (pg. 178). This widening of access to other groups by the participants reflects the morphogenesis discussed by Archer (2017) (2.4.2) and through access to wider networks and the availability of new resources or knowledge enables innovation and opportunity.

This morphogenetic perspective is not as apparent in the narratives of Sam and Linda, where both describe feelings of frustration at the lack of change and limited impact of the group. Archer (2017) (2.4.2) explores the idea that reproduction of social order within a group means there is a propensity for this to dominate over the opportunity for change and transformation. Linda recognised the "*sense of collegiality*" (pg. 185) within the group but her question of "*where does it go?*" suggests the morphostatic

outcome, suggested by Archer (2017) where the status quo remains. Sam explained her PLC had been around for “*donkey’s years*” (pg. 201), which could be why Watson (2014) (2.2.3) suggested PLCs were an almost permanent feature.

Within these groups, according to Archer (2014) (2.4.2), the ‘pre-established and vested interests’ of a closed network can result in habitual activities, described by Bourdieu (1980) (2.3.2) as *habitus*. Sam describes her group from the perspective of “...*same people...same messages...*” (pg. 201) and whilst she recognised the group’s intention was to be supportive, she felt the schools were not willing to share due to the “*changed landscape*” (pg. 201) that was due to the competition between schools for student numbers and the Academisation of schooling. This landscape is the backdrop of this thesis discussed in 1.2 and Linda had also felt a lack of sharing within her group due to schools being too “*competitive*” (pg. 187). The interpretations of Linda and Sam are interesting because rather than their groups embracing collaborative practices and the exchange of knowledge, it is much more suggestive of an extraction of knowledge. Watson (2014) (2.2.3) suggested that the appeal of the ‘community’ narrative in PLCs could explain the explosion in the promotion of the groups for educational reform (Frankham, 2006) (2.2.1). However, there was the potential for a ‘silencing’ of dissatisfaction (Watson, 2014) where in 2.4.2 I suggested the security of morphostatic outcomes could be appealing in an environment where constant change can be destabilising.

In considering the destabilising effects of the changes within education, I now move the discussion to consider the impact of agency on mental health.

5.4.3 Mental Health

In 2.5, Howard and Johnson (2004) imply that teachers are susceptible to burnout due to the level of emotional labour that teaching requires. This, combined with the teachers not feeling they can exert control in their environments suggested by Tak et al. (2017) (2.4.4), means how agentic an individual is feeling can influence their risk to burnout and stress. This was described by Paul when he suggested that his conflict with a senior leader made him feel *"I couldn't do my job"* (pg. 149). This depersonalisation, as described by Maslach (2003) (2.5), had led him to consider leaving the profession however, he had decided to reduce his working hours to help him manage his workload and family commitments. Not feeling in control of workplace conditions and not being able to talk openly were factors discussed by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) (2.4.3) around the demotivation of teachers. Linda felt that stress was targeted as a personal failure within schools and there appeared to be no change in the culture or structure to reduce, what she described as *"the temperature of the boiler"* (pg. 191). This is significant because she implies the pressure on her would continue to rise, without any accommodation for release. I explore this more in 5.5.4, however in the context of agency Linda explains *"I do a 70-hour week"* (pg. 191) and implies she feels of lack of control over what she can or cannot chose to do.

In 2.4.4, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) suggest a disconnect between teachers and their workplace environment can have a significant impact of their sense of belonging, which could result in emotional exhaustion. The feeling of having control over their working lives was important in the narratives of the participants. Sam had reflected

on the role of the MAT and around conformity on Trust wide policies through the way she was monitored for compliance. Sam was the only participant who had reflected on a lack of autonomy in her role *"I have very, very little autonomy"* (pg. 194) and the impact this had on her job satisfaction and mental health. Howard and Johnson (2004) (2.6.2) suggest autonomy in the workplace as an important protective factor for teacher well-being, however Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2016) (2.4.3) focus more on collective agency rather than individual autonomy. In 5.4.2, I discussed the ways the participants drew from the relational resources in their networks. The use of the networks to enable agency appears to be collective, as suggested by Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2016) (2.4.3), where Peter describes the importance of *"commonality"* (pg. 161) with others who have the same pressures and frustrations. Paul describes the importance of the camaraderie with colleagues and Julie could *"gain perspective"* (pg. 165) from her close colleague.

These narratives would imply the importance of the relationships in the networks for enabling the feeling of control in their working lives because they had an outlet where they could gain support. This reiterates the suggestion from Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) (2.4.3) about the importance of 'belonging'. However, Matt reminds us of the significance of the workplace culture on mental health because he recognises the limitations of the support from his network if the culture was having too much of a negative influence: *"it wouldn't be enough, the informal support"* (pg. 176). Shaw et al. (2016) (2.6.3) highlight the importance of the environment in the context of resilience and resilience is now considered through research question four.

5.4.4 Response to the Research Question

This third research question was seeking to understand how the interactions of the participants in their networks influenced their sense of agency. Across the narratives, the sense of belonging was hugely influential in how the participants felt in terms of agency and how they perceived themselves to be in control of their working lives. One of the reasons belonging was important was it influenced how the participants felt their approaches to senior leaders would be received. Where the participants felt they would receive an open and respectful audience to their suggestions they were more inclined to feel positive about how they were able to enact change. However, where they felt this would be dismissed or would receive, what Sam for example described as “*lip service*” (pg. 194), there was a resentment which developed. This was highlighted by Day and Gu (2010) (3.4.1) as a characteristic for teachers who had been in teaching for more than 23 years and was present in the narratives of Sam and Linda, who represented ‘veteran’ teachers within the participants in my study.

The role of personal and departmental relationships was also important in the level of agency the participants experienced. The proximity of working relationships allowed for the participants to engage in a professional dialogue which impacted on their sense of agency, as they were able to access advice and support through the collegiality they experienced. Julie, for example, appreciated the shared office space where she could discuss issues and Peter explained this was also important to him to be working with colleagues who all had a shared understanding of the challenges in their roles. Where this was absent, there was a disconnect which the participants felt, and this impacted on the way they considered themselves able to exert control over their roles. This was

apparent from Sam in the way she felt disconnected within her school and within her department which was visible through the differences in the policy-driven culture which existed in the school and Sam's engagement with research. The sense of efficacy and the role of beliefs were important in the way the participants were able to remain committed and to continue to use their networks to develop their agentic capacity. Despite Sam's disconnect from her working environment, she remained committed to her focus and widened her network so that she could engage in conversations that she felt were absent from her daily life.

Bandura (2000) (2.4.1) suggests self-efficacy is influential on a person's choice of action as well as their commitment and perseverance. Across the participants there was a range of experiences which impacted on their sense of efficacy; Paul found some of his relationships with senior leaders problematic as they created barriers and challenges for his role, and he drew from relationships with his students and with colleagues to help him keep a perspective over what was important. Julie also experienced differing relationships within her department; some were supportive whereas others she felt were problematic and this resulted in differing approaches during their interactions. In 1.4, I explained how the role of the middle leaders meant they would be visible within a wide variety of networks within the school structure. Within the narratives this is evident through the range of experiences they explored during the interview. Where there was a mutuality in their interactions, the participants would express how this enabled them to feel a sense of efficacy which contributed to their commitment and motivation. The stability in this was important; knowing that they would be respected and well-received made them feel more confident in asking for advice or seeking support with issues. However, where they

experienced barriers or knew there would little action taken around their concerns, they recognised they needed to change their approach or seek new avenues for discussion. The belief they could control these situations was important because where the participants experienced limited options for resolution, they disclosed to feeling limited efficacy which affected their mental health and made them consider their long-term commitment to the profession.

5.5 Research Question Four

To what extent do the contribution that their networks make affect their resilience within the workplace?

In 2.6.1, I highlighted the definition of resilience from Gu and Day (2013, pg. 26) as the ‘capacity to maintain equilibrium and a sense of commitment and agency in everyday worlds in which teachers teach.’ I have taken this position also in my thesis and I use it here in my discussion around how the relationships and networks affect my participants’ resilience. I begin with an exploration of the perspectives of resilience from my participants.

5.5.1 Participant Perspectives

In 4.4.2, I discussed how Peter had brought the word resilience into his narrative, which had not been present in the interviews previously. As a result, I added this question into the interview with the subsequent interviews to get a sense of what they perceived the meaning of the resilience to be.

Peter had used “*withstand the pressure*” (pg. 160) to maintain performativity. This was interesting because Linda had suggested in 5.4.3 the level of pressure was a factor in the stress and burnout of colleagues. Linda’s perception was one of “*bending rather*

than breaking” (pg. 190) when it came to responding to the stresses in her role. She used the metaphor of ‘steel’, and this reflects the description from Byrne and Callaghan (2016) (2.6.3) of a system reaching its elastic limit if over stretched. Sam also came from the position of *“keeping going”* (pg. 203) and Matt also felt resilience for him was *“the ability to keep going forward”* (pg. 181). These descriptions mirror Day and Hong’s (2016) (2.6.3) metaphorical model of latent capacity, where resilience is considered as the reserve tank for a system to maintain an equilibrium. The perspective from Julie was also the same: *“getting on with it”* (pg. 172). All the participants recognised the level of stress and challenges they faced, and resilience for them was, as described by Brunetti (2006) (2.6.1), an ability to ‘stay the course’.

The descriptions from the participants were all focused on their need to keep a momentum, to keeping going and as Linda suggested *“you can’t let it get to you”* (pg. 189). By it, I have interpreted this to mean not only the workload pressure, but also the accountability and the focus on performativity. Within her narrative, Linda has discussed the impact these had had on her and other colleagues and her frustration that stress was considered a personal failure rather than directed as a failure in the system. Shaw et al. (2016) (2.6.3) highlight the importance of looking at the environment when considering resilience. Sam had expressed the way her environment had affected her *“I was completely within just that little world”* (pg. 203) and the restrictions that came resulted in her expanding her network to find another outlet for her. Adaptation is considered an aspect of being resilient (Byrne & Callaghan, 2016) (2.6.3) and Sam had adjusted within her network to wider her circle and find support through discussion with others on social media.

From the participants' narratives, one area of importance across was keeping perspective. Gu and Day (2013) (2.6.1) point to the need to maintain an equilibrium and keeping perspective of what is important is part of that balance. Matt suggested that not getting "*down-hearted*" (pg. 181) when faced with failure and equally not getting "*complacent*" (pg. 181) with success was important for him to keep in mind. Paul found that using the perspectives of trusted friends was a good way for him to keep a sense of what is important, and Julie suggested her ability to "*compartmentalise*" (pg. 172) was important in her resilience as she was able to maintain a distance between work and home lives. Beltman, Mansfield and Price (2011) (2.5) describe resilience as the equilibrium between the risk and protective factors which are part of individuals' everyday worlds. Therefore, I now consider the ways the participants draw from their networks and relationships from the consideration of protective factors as coping strategies.

5.5.2 The Power of the Rant

In 5.2.2, the bond that was the strongest for the participants were those where they had a high degree of trust and reciprocity. This trust and reciprocity were important for advice, for perspective, and for knowing they were able to 'let off steam' and talk honestly without the fear of repercussion. This aspect of the participants' narratives was important in the way they considered their resilience. "*The whinges and the moans*" (pg. 160), for Peter, was important with those who understood the pressures. Being able to work in a shared office meant he was able to "*vent and ask for advice*" (pg. 161) which would indicate the ease of access allowed him to manage his frustrations quickly. Being able to confide in her husband and close friends was also

important to Anna, where she described their conversations as her *“daily dumping ground”* (pg. 139). She knew she was able to use her department relationships to gain *“perspective”* (pg. 144) of the good things in the department, however as highlighted in 1.4, middle leaders are often ‘squeezed’ between department friendships and line management responsibilities. Therefore, she valued her close friends and husband for being able to *“talk something through”* (pg. 139).

Both Peter and Matt also discussed the importance of social activities and sports as a way for them to *“let off steam”* (pg. 159). For Matt, he appreciated being able to have *“trivial conversations”* (pg. 177) and he felt through the sporting activities friendships were able to develop which strengthened his network and they had become *“better colleagues”* (pg. 177). Mansfield et al. (2016) (2.6.1), suggest that certain dispositions allow individuals to develop greater capacity for resilience, and having a ‘cheery disposition’, for example, would allow for an ease of building friendships. Peter was also very active and found that teachers would often group together at the events and talk about things associated with their school or within education. Peter appreciated the *“natter”* (pg. 158) and being able to talk freely away from workplace restrictions. Beltman, Mansfield and Price (2011) (2.6.2) suggest that understanding the way teachers gain support through their informal networks is an important area to consider and it would appear from the narratives here the ability to talk freely, outside of work, was providing opportunity for them to release tension and share knowledge and resources as highlighted in 5.3.3. The power of emotional support that was gained through their networks was visible through being able to talk and share issues with trusted people. Phrases such as *“let off steam”* (pg. 159), *“vent”* (pg. 161) and as Julie

explained “...have a moan without it mattering” (pg. 165) were all significant for the participants being able to gain a sense of perspective.

Paul also valued the importance of being able to off-load and vent to colleagues. In 5.4.3, the camaraderie Paul felt between himself and colleagues was a key factor for him to manage his mental health at work. “*Banter*” (pg. 153) and “*having a laugh*” (pg. 153) were important aspects of his relationships. These attributes are like those explored by Peter and Matt. What is interesting about these narratives is the way the “*rant*” (pg. 148) provides opportunity for strengthening the bond between the participants and those in their networks. As Julie explained “*a moan without it mattering*” (pg. 165) was important because there would be no repercussions and “*they would bring you back down*” (pg. 175). Fredrickson (2004) (2.6.2) talks abouts the social bonds acting as a ‘reserve tank’ and this metaphor is how Day and Hong (2016) (2.6.3) describe resilience in the maintaining the equilibrium.

5.5.3 Relational Resilience

In 2.6.2, the concept of relational resilience was positioned as the ‘nurturing of relationships for the nurturing of resilience’ (Day and Gu, 2014a). As resilience is considered from the perspective of ‘maintaining an equilibrium’ (Gu & Day, 2013) (2.6.1) I am exploring the participants’ narratives to consider how they draw from their relationships to help maintain this balance. While they use their wider networks for information, sharing of knowledge and resources, it is their close networks which they use for the purpose of maintaining their equilibrium. These close networks are represented from their families and from their trusted friends and colleagues. It is these relationships which are explored now, in the context of relational resilience.

Family Relationships

Across the participants, the role of their families was discussed around the way they offer support. In the case of Anna, her husband was her *“daily dumping ground”* (pg. 139) and Paul had said his wife would listen to his frustrations when he got home. However, across these narratives there was an understanding of the damaging effects of taking work stresses home and the need for a balance was important. Anna and Paul both described using their drives home to *“sift”* (pg. 44) through the day's stresses so when they arrived home, they could be present for their partners. This was especially important to Anna because of her children and Paul had commented on recognising the impact his work was having on his relationship with his wife. Paul had reduced his teaching commitment to gain an extra day at home which he describes as *“weekends have felt endless”* (pg. 152) and this had had a positive impact at home. These are important observations, because rather than their family been their outlet for their frustrations and stresses the participants focused on trying to create a balance at home.

Both Matt and Julie talked about creating a distance between their work and home lives. Julie described this as *“compartmentalising”* (pg. 172) and Matt talked about the *“psychological”* (pg. 180) distance between home and school. Matt had talked about the support his wife provided in terms of managing the home, especially when he was studying to become a teacher. Matt explained that he had made the career move into teaching based on creating a better life balance with work, and knowing he had support at home was important. Although there was relatively little discussion from all the participants about their home relationships, in comparison to those in school

and around education, the sense was that family provided a backstop of support. Knowing there was family at home was important and where the participants discussed this, they were understanding of their responsibility in achieving the balance to not put too much strain on their families. Beltman, Mansfield and Price (2011) (2.6.2) suggested that teachers gain significant support from the networks outside of teaching, through friends and family relationships. This would be interesting to explore further, and I reflect on this in 6.5, especially as both Sam and Julie had suggested they had not really reflected on the support from family in the interview which suggests there is opportunity to explore the role of relationships outside of teaching.

Trusted Friends and Colleagues

In the previous section, I explored the role of the participants' families in providing relational support, in the context of relational resilience. It was clear from those narratives it was important to the participants they maintained a balance between work and home to avoid damaging their relationships with their partners. Maintaining this perspective on what was important at work appears to be drawn from the participants' relationships with friends and colleagues where they place a trust in their opinions and knowledge that the conversations will remain confidential. Paul drew from his close colleagues at work when they would say "*get a grip*" (pg. 148) or "*work isn't as important as family*" (pg. 148). Julie would also draw from her trusted colleague who would tell her "*...you're being daft...*" (pg. 165) and take their advice on what to focus on. The difference between these conversations and the ones discussed in 5.5.2, is the way the participants trust in the advice of their confidantes.

They may rant or vent their frustrations with these colleagues also, but the trust they place in their opinions is important in the way they can draw their resilience through maintaining this balance and perspective.

These relationships, however, have developed over time. Matt explains that over time *“trivial relationships”* (pg. 178) can become more meaningful, and Anna explained how she needed to invest time to develop her relationships for them to become *“solid...not fickle”* (pg. 146). This reflects Day and Gu’s (2014a) (2.6.2) position around nurturing relationships. Anna had maintained close friendships with colleagues from previous schools and these were important to her when she wanted to talk things through. Sam explained how some of her relationships from her wider network on Twitter had become much stronger and these had added to her sense of *“self-worth”* (pg. 203) which had led her to consider herself much more resilient than she had been previously. This was also reflective of the way Matt considered his close colleagues to be *“advocates”* (pg. 183) when things do not go so well.

5.5.4 Response to the Research Question

In this final question, the intention was to explore the contribution of the networks and relationships on the resilience of the participants. Across the participants who were asked about their perspective of resilience, they all considered this from the position of ‘keeping going’ or ‘moving forward’. The impact of their relationships was wide, in that, they drew from their network's knowledge, resources, benefits, collegiate activity all which feed into their sense of efficacy and commitment in their work. However, they also drew from their relationships a sense of maintaining a perspective to keep a balance between work priorities and those at home. They were

able to use their relationships to 'let off steam' and 'rant' with others who understood the challenges and pressures they faced. However, where they had trusted colleagues, the participants would access a deeper level of emotional support through listening to their advice and focusing on their priorities.

Keeping the focus on their priorities at home was important to the participants and the value they placed on their families was important through their need to maintain a balance between their work and home lives. Reducing their teaching commitment, using their commutes to 'sift' through the day's stress, or talking things through with their trusted friends were important ways of them maintaining their balance. However, being flexible and adapting to the situation were also important in the narratives of the participants, especially where they experienced barriers or obstacles in their work. This was especially apparent in Sam's narrative around how she navigated her disconnect with her workplace culture and the pressures this had put upon her.

5.6 Summary of the Key Findings

Across the narratives of the participants in chapter 4, my study has captured a wide range of experiences and the different ways they have responded to their workplace cultures and challenges. This visibility I consider as having been captured through the design of the research methods and the use of the mapping approach during the interview. The visibility shows the working lives of the participants and their interactions within their networks. For example, the participants all talk constantly about the curriculum and student issues with their colleagues and members of their departments. They are involved in wide networks where they share resources, discuss

school policies, talk about best practice, and engage in a dialogue about teaching with other teachers in informal as well as formal settings. They all experience a distance between themselves and their senior teams, and therefore appear much more connected within their departments. In 3.7.2, I discussed the purpose of the case-by-case comparison of the narratives across the four research questions was to bring their experiences together into a combined narrative. Through this process of analysis, I consider there to be three key messages from their experiences, and I present these here now:

Proximity of Working and Shared Spaces

This was an important aspect across the narratives for the participants, where they expressed their appreciation of being able to work closely with their colleagues. This proximity allowed for a continual flow of conversation around their daily challenges and provided opportunity to gain advice and support quickly and easily. The proximity of their colleagues also enabled trusting relationships to form, and this was important in the way they were able to draw from their relationships a sense of perspective. The friendships the participants formed gave them a sense of belonging and this in turn influenced how efficacious and agentic they considered themselves to be.

The informality of the shared spaces was also important in their sense of belonging and there was discussion about the importance of having informal conversations about subjects outside of teaching to encourage these friendships. Being able to meet colleagues around the photocopier, or in school-based extra-curricular activities were important for creating the opportunity for friendly chat and finding out more about colleagues to deepen their friendships. These opportunities for informal chat were

also important for the participants to 'let off steam' and break away from the pressures of work.

The aspect of shared space extended also into social activities, and the significance of extra-curricular activities was highlighted in its importance for developing deeper relationships amongst colleagues. This has relevance for school leaders as these events can provide opportunities for students as well as teachers to develop wider friendships through these experiences and this does not need to be considered from a staff only focused position.

Opportunity to Engage in Professional Dialogue

Having the opportunity to engage in dialogue with colleagues inside and outside of school were considered important to the way the participants perceived themselves from an agentic perspective. Getting a sense of being able to contribute to discussions around issues facing the departments or curriculum challenges in schools enabled the participants to feel a sense of control and an ability to enact change. Feeling silenced or having a lack of influence over situations was damaging to their self-belief and sense of worth and value in their work. This was especially apparent where there was a disconnect between the values of the workplace culture and those of the participant.

Professional Learning Communities provided some of the participants' opportunities to engage in professional discussion around the issues they faced with other middle leaders. There were contrasting perspectives from the participants around the ability of these communities to bring about change, however from the interviews there was a suggestion that under certain circumstances the PLCs could be provide many opportunities for reform. These communities were also important for the participants

to network and widen their relationships to gain access into the resources of other schools and departments. This was especially important for those in smaller schools who had limited resources.

Backstop of Trusted Relationships

Across the narratives, the participants recognised the importance of their trusted friendships. They recognised the reciprocity and trust they held, and they were protective of them. Whether this be through managing their family relationships by trying not to overburden their partners with the stress and frustrations of their work or maintaining a balance between their work and home lives to be present for their children. Knowing they had trusted friendships within work or with other in teaching who they could discuss their frustrations with were important. These relationships helped to give the participants a sense of perspective and maintain a balance over their priorities. This outlet was especially important where there was conflict at work, and they knew they could have honest conversations without the risk of repercussions.

These conclusions I have drawn from the experiences of my participants play a significant role in our understanding of what it is, to be a middle leader in secondary schools in England. In 6.6, I discuss my recommendations for practice, which is drawing on these conclusions, as I consider how my thesis contributes to the wider discussions around teacher retention.

6. Chapter 6 Concluding Thoughts

6.1 Introduction

In this closing chapter, I present what I consider to be my contribution to knowledge through my study and connect this with my journey through the PhD. I reflect on my rationale behind the choices that I made, especially around the study design and the ethical positions, and discuss, with the benefit of hindsight, the changes I would make. This hindsight is discussed further through recognising the limitations in my study before I present its recommendations for practice and further research.

6.2 Contribution to Knowledge

Through the design of my study and my exploration with the participants of their lived experiences, I consider my contribution to knowledge on the complex nature of network interactions and the impact of these interactions on the middle leaders' sense of efficacy, autonomy, and agency. I also consider my methodological contribution through the critically subjective approach to interpretivist research. I present here these areas which I consider to be of the most significance and discuss the contribution and why this is important:

6.2.1 My Interactional Model from the Findings

In 2.7, I presented in figure (2) my Accumulative Model, which I considered to represent the way social networks, capital, agency, and resilience were all interrelated with each other. However, having explored the experiences of the participants, analysed these against the literature, and gained a visibility into the interactional way

these constructs influence each other, I now consider the model to be more representative through figure (6):

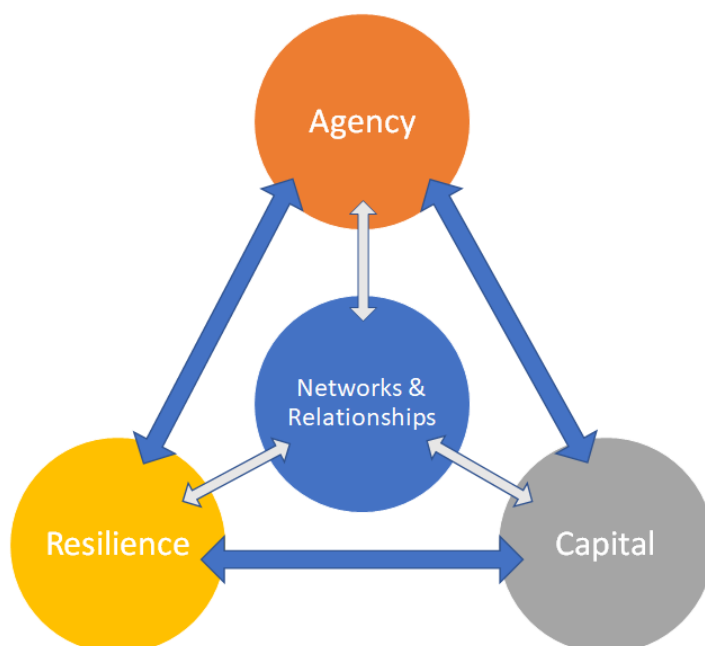


Figure (6): My Interactional Model from the Findings

The reason I consider this model to be more representative than the way I had considered previously is because in this model every aspect can influence the other directly and indirectly. In the accumulative model, the influence accumulated from the networks through to the resilience, whereas in this model the multi-interactional nature of the constructs mirrors the experiences of participants. For example, in the model in figure (2), capital would only influence resilience through its accumulation into agency. However, in this model capital can have influence directly. Peter, for example, discussed the way he drew his resilience from his shared experiences with other pastoral leads. This is only one example in amongst many discussed in chapter 5, where there is less evidence of the accumulative, linear relationship presented in figure (2) and much more of the interactional relationships between the constructs

displayed in figure (6). This distinction between my accumulative model and my interactional model is important as it contributes more effectively with the positions of complexity and morphogenesis discussed within this thesis. My accumulative model displays a linear causality which does not represent the multiplicity and complex nature of the interactions described by Archer (2017) within morphogenesis, discussed in 2.4.2, or the way Bryne and Callaghan (2014) explain adaptation from a complexity perspective in 2.6.3. Therefore, recognising the interconnected and complex nature of the way each of the constructs can have impact is an important contribution in the way we consider schools as 'complex adaptative systems' (Keshavarz et al., 2010, pg. 1468) and this is considered further in 6.7.

6.2.2 Middle Leaders' Efficacy, Autonomy, and Agency

The narratives of the participants, presented and analysed across chapters 4 and 5, present a picture of a wide variation of lived experiences. This wide variation is reflective of the complex nature of interactions across and within networks presented in 6.2.1. Despite this variation, there are commonalities between the participants on the impacts of these interactions, especially around their efficacy and agency, and it is these commonalities which I consider make a significant contribution to our understanding and knowledge of policy and practice which surround middle leaders.

In 5.6 I presented my key findings, and one aspect of those findings was the opportunity to engage in professional dialogue. This aspect of the findings is of particular importance because it reflects the nature of the discourse which flows through the participants' networks in their daily interactions. Those participants who felt a sense of being heard and whose opinion was sought within these conversations

presented narratives which displayed self-belief and agency in their abilities and their roles. Where the participants felt an exclusion from the professional discourse within part of their networks, the narratives displayed a disconnect from their beliefs around agency and efficacy and felt much less autonomous in their working lives. These polarised positions of the participants raise an important awareness in our understanding of the experiences of middle leaders, especially around those who are given what I would describe as a 'seat at the table' and are able to contribute to strategic discussion and take responsibility for the direction and focus of their departments.

In contrast to these experiences, the participants who felt they were marginalised, excluded from strategic inputs, and given minimal autonomy in the leadership of their departments described frustrations and disconnections with their roles. This also extended into a need to consider alternative roles outside of schools or leaving the profession entirely. Their financial obligations, their commitment to their students, combined with the support of their families and close colleagues were significant factors in the decision to remain in the profession and 'weather the storm' in the hope that the situation would change through the passage of time or change in leadership.

These perspectives are important contributory factors to the way teacher retention is approached through future policy and practice. Where middle leaders were able to demonstrate an alignment, or conformity, with the culture of their workplaces they described positive experiences in their working lives. Where decisions or strategic directions were questioned, the resulting exclusion and marginalisation described by the middle leaders resulted in changes in their behaviours. Bourdieu (1980, pg. 56), in

2.3.2, suggests that behaviours, or *habitus*, are ‘socially constrained’ because there is an interrelationship between the social conditions and the practice of certain dispositions. Within the narratives of the participants there was suggestion of middle leaders aligning themselves with their senior teams, which they recognised could be advantageous for them in terms of their autonomy and future career progression. This has important implications for the ‘complex adaptivity’ of schools, discussed later in 6.7, as it emphasises the reproduction of cultural capitals, discussed in 2.3.2, which can lead to reduced innovation, described by Archer as morphostasis in 2.4.2.

Therefore, the need for autonomy and responsibility across all the middle leaders was important. The narratives demonstrated that they recognised the impact this had for them and none of the participants felt they needed a formal coaching or mentoring process to enable them to carry out their roles. Where this had been prescribed, the participants had expressed a frustration at the lack of freedom to make decisions on the wider issues affecting their departments and the need to conform with the managerial tasks of their roles. This insight into the lived experiences of the participants has an important contribution to make to future practice and research, discussed in 6.6 and 6.7, as it requires senior leaders to ascribe professional autonomy to middle leaders. This means the senior teams should relinquish a level of control over practice to allow for an evolution of the workplace cultures which the middle leaders feel invested and committed to.

6.2.3 Critical Subjectivity in Interpretivist Research

In chapter 3 I presented my philosophical and theoretical positions in my study. Whilst a qualitative study which is interpretivist and grounded in social constructionism is a

common combination in social sciences, it is my third philosophical position of critical subjectivity which I consider having significance for future researchers and their approach to research design. Reason (1999, pg. 212) uses the term critical subjectivity in the context of co-operative and participatory research where he urges for a recognition of living knowledge and the contribution this can make to research findings. Within qualitative research there is a need to recognise the significance of researcher positionality and the influence this has for the study in terms of data collection methods and the interpretations in analysis. This is often discussed in the context of 'reflexivity' in research (Ormston et al., 2014, pg. 22) where the effect of the researcher is considered from their influence on the trustworthiness of the findings (Dahler-Larson, 2018, pg. 881). Within qualitative research there is a suggestion of the blurring between the ontological and epistemological divide (Waring, 2012, pg. 18) and the influence between what Bhaskar (1998, pg. 29) tells us what we can know to exist, exists in what can be known. When considering the positions of participatory and co-operative inquiry, there is a challenge of the divide between the researcher and the 'researched' (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2010, pg. 1), which using the positions of Bhaskar and Waring, I would suggest also exists in interpretivist study.

The reason why these blurred divides are significant is because it is within these 'grey' areas I consider the 'holes' within which the 'objectiveness' of qualitative, interpretivist research is challenged for the same rigour as quantitative, positivist methods. If we are to accept the influence of the experiences and perspectives of the researcher in qualitative research then it is not only important these positions are known, but that there is also a process through which the researcher is able to

transition through their ways of knowing. This process of paying critical attention to their ways of knowing and challenging their ways of knowing through the action, described by Reason (1999, pg. 212), of research cycling means the researcher can not only state how they may hold a bias within their study, but to also explore how and why. This shift from disclosing bias but also exploring it, allows for critical subjectivity to be considered from the perspective of active reflexivity with an emancipatory purpose. This means through the process of the research, I as the researcher not only explored the experiences of the participants, but I was also able to challenge my own understanding of my experiences and the way in which this influenced the way I interpreted the participants' stories. This position, therefore, I would consider makes a significant contribution to the way in which we approach discussion around rigour and trustworthiness in qualitative, interpretative research.

6.3 My PhD Journey

I would consider my PhD journey to be best described as 'serendipitous' and, having talked at length about this with others who have completed their own research, I do not consider myself to be alone in this reflection. The completion of my thesis has been an iterative one, moving backwards and forwards between ideas and concepts, sometimes in a muddle, occasionally in a straight line, and most commonly ending up in a knot. In terms of the learning journey, this process has led me to consider areas I had previously discarded or find myself immersed in others I had never considered. For this reason, in my reflections in this concluding chapter of my thesis, I will consider my route through my PhD from an academic perspective:

My approach to my doctorate has been one of a 'researcher in training' and whilst in the beginning I felt that my thesis would be my life's work, I have overtime come to consider it as an apprenticeship for my future contribution to academic life. I began, I think like most embarking on doctoral study, with a consideration of the variety of research approaches and having come from a positivist, quantitative background in scientific method, I was in awe at the range and overlap of qualitative and interpretivist approaches. In the beginning my study had been to explore the impact of master's level study on teachers, however, I quickly became interested through the work of Brunetti in the US, the extensive work of Day and Gu in England, Priestley in Scotland as well as Beltman and Mansfield amongst others in Australia around the issues of resilience and agency for teachers.

My own experiences within schools and the influence of the relationships within this meant the literature on resilience and my studies into social science and qualitative approaches to capture the perspectives of others became a key focus for my thesis. In 3.5 I discussed my pilot study which had used a mixed method approach to explore the connections between self-efficacy (an aspect of agency) and resilience. As I explained in this section, the responses to the open questions and the experiences these revealed were influential in my decision to design a wholly qualitative study with the intention of capturing an authentic voice of the participants.

Within my doctoral studies I was able to attend numerous twilight and full day teaching events around research and one of these had been on 'Participatory Mapping'. I found this very inspiring and felt that I could use elements of this approach to gain a visibility of people's experiences and my exploration of participatory inquiry

led me to Reason and his presentation of 'Critical Subjectivity'. Whilst I knew that I was not going to conduct a participatory or co-operative inquiry, there were elements of this methodology that were influential to my thinking. At the same time, I also found myself interested in 'Complexity' and 'Chaos Theory', which did not come as a surprise to me because as a Biochemist I was very aware of entropy within chemical systems and the autopoietic nature of biological environments. Manion, Cohen and Morrison's textbook discussion around complexity and their summarisation of 'Connection-Feedback-Emergence' were influential as it resonated for me with Archer's writing around agency, especially in her discussions of 'Morphogenesis'. Through these explorations with the literature and, recognising that I was not considering what Pinnegar and Daynes (2007, pg. 4) described as 'prediction and control' but looking for 'understanding' through qualitative research, my research methodology and design became around capturing the lived experiences of other teachers in the context of their relationships.

6.4 Choices and Changes

I had chosen a qualitative frame for my research as I wanted to capture the lived experiences as interpreted by the participants and this is a strength in the study. My choice of data collection methods, with a focus to encourage authentic discussion, I consider have been successful as the data I have collected is very rich with evidence of authentic reflections by the participants. It was this richness of the data which prompted the dilemmas around my approaches to analysis and whether I would be able to maintain the visibility of my participants using Thematic Analysis. The decision to combine thematic analysis with narrative analysis has enabled the study to retain a

series of relatable stories, whilst also providing a combined narrative around the research questions. These approaches I reflect on further in 6.6, as these stories are important for use by teachers, middle leaders, and other stakeholders in their understanding around teacher networks.

Having been able to capture the visibility of the participants' experiences in the way that I have, has led me to consider whether I have also been able to capture their workplace cultures and structures in the same way. Therefore, I think a case study approach could have enabled a different perspective, not on the experiences and the interpretations of participants necessarily, but on the visibility of the values of the school and the ways that workplace culture was mediated. That said, this approach could bring problems around the ethical considerations around anonymity. By having too much information about the school context, this could make identification of teachers much more accessible, and this may also influence their ability to be honest in the interviews. However, I consider this more in 6.7 and recommendations for future research.

6.5 Limitations

In 5.5.3, I suggested the exploration of the participants' family and friendships networks outside of teaching as an area which is under-represented in the study. Some participants chose to talk about their families and other did not. However, the focus of the study was to explore professional networks and relationships and this boundary had been placed at the beginning of the interview when the participants were asked about who they would discuss their work issues with. The reflections of Sam and Julie on the absence of their wider family and friendship support reflects

what Beltman, Mansfield and Price (2011) (2.6.2) suggested as a potential area for consideration.

The research design and methodology of the study enabled a 'snap-shot' of the participants' exploration of their experiences. Whilst this gives a suggestion of how their relationships have developed over time, I think it would be interesting to explore and understand the ways which teacher evolve in real time. Whilst the data has provided a rich dialogue from the participants' perspectives, returning to the network map, which was made in the first interview, could provide an opportunity for the participants to review this at different intervals throughout the school year. This aspect of social network analysis could provide an alternative viewpoint of the distribution of relationships and could help to understand the mechanisms through which the participants develop trusting relationships.

Part of my research design included the use of open, on-line questionnaires. These were sent to the participants both before and after the interview. The intention of the post-interview questionnaire, discussed in 3.5.2, was to understand how the participants viewed the influence of their networks and how the research experience impacted on them. Across the participants the use of the post-interview questionnaire was inconsistent; two participants did not complete this, and of the five who did respond, there was a wide variation in the level of detail of their reflections of the research process. Whilst the information did contribute to the narratives of the individual participants and provided an insight in the way their participation had been beneficial to each of them; this variation across the participants resulted in a limitation

in the way their responses could be used to make wider interpretations of the emancipatory impacts of research participation.

6.6 Recommendations for Practice

In 1.6, I explained that the intentions for my thesis was to contribute to the way, as a profession, teachers' commitment and motivations can be influenced through their networks and professional relationships. I consider this to be important as there could be considered a near crisis-point in teacher retention, as there are reported downward trends from the Government data around teacher numbers, discussed in 1.2. Therefore, recognising the significance of my thesis could make an important contribution to the discussion on how to prevent teachers leaving the profession. The experiences from Paul of workplace bullying and those of Sam, whose perceived exclusion from professional dialogue in her school due to the workplace cultures surrounding Multi-Academy Trusts should be a warning of the ways in which middle leaders can experience mental distress in their working relationships. However, the cultures of open dialogue and reciprocity described by Peter and Matt demonstrate the ways that collegiate relationships with senior leaders influence the way middle leaders feel agentic in their roles.

The conclusions I have drawn in 5.6 from the findings in my study, highlight the importance of proximity of working and the access to professional dialogue as significant areas which have impact on the agency and motivations of the middle leaders. These, along with the backstop of trusted relationships, influence their sense of resilience and commitment to their roles. Therefore, providing opportunity for

these activities for the middle leaders are important considerations for senior leaders in schools.

Whilst my research took place with middle leaders pre-COVID, the findings have relevance in the post-COVID considerations, especially in the way we approach the on-line communities of teachers and educators, and the workplace cultures this creates. Child (2021, pg. 117) discusses the importance of recognising the way 'collective activities' can be influential on the psychology and behaviour of individuals in their approaches to common problems. Therefore, it is important the contributions of my findings, discussed in 5.6, and the development of the interactional model, presented in 6.2.1, are translatable into post-COVID policies to recognise the considerable influence working relationships have on both the well-being of teachers and positive effects on workplace culture.

6.7 Recommendations for Future Research

In 6.4 and 6.5, I discuss the limitations of my study and the possible changes I would make. The changes I suggest are to widen the visibility of teachers' networks and the way these evolve over time. These areas I would recommend for future research because, whilst my study has demonstrated the ways in which teacher networks and relationships influence their motivations and commitment, it would be valuable to understand this in more detail. Therefore, exploring mid-career teachers and veteran teachers, specifically to understand the demands on them, will be important for the ways we can target these groups of teachers and extend their longevity, productively, in the profession.

In 6.2.1 I presented my interactional model as being representative of the way in which capital, agency, and resilience interact, together and independently, through the social interactions within networks. This model makes a significant contribution to how we regard morphogenesis and adaptability, in terms of the positive outcomes through developments and innovations. This is important as we consider further research into the ways that organisations, including schools, interpret the influences around 'complex adaptation'. However, I also consider it to be important that we recognise the effects of the 'darker side' of relationships, discussed in 2.3.3 and 5.3.3, within school structures. Whilst morphostasis is considered the state of the *status quo* as the alternative position to morphogenesis, there is no consideration of a decline or worsening state. Whilst this could be presented in the remit of morphogenesis and the structural elaboration discussed by Archer (2010) (2.4.2), the discussions around the elaborative positions are considered from the perspectives of 'human flourishing' (Archer, 2017) (2.4.2). The suggestion of the negative effects of workplace cultures and relationships within my study would be more suggestive of a 'morphodecline'. Therefore, I consider it to be important for future research to explore the negative effects of school cultures as well as understand the ways these can be positively transformative. This is because as we seek to understand how our school cultures can create the conditions for continued commitment and motivation of our teachers, we must make sure we honour the existence of the 'darker side'. This is to avoid future criticisms like those of Frankham (2006) in 2.2.1, Watson (2014) in 2.2.3, and Moolenaar (2012) in 2.3.3 around the promotion of social networks as the panacea in educational reform and school culture. The narratives from my participants displayed a wide variation in their experiences, where their stories demonstrated both the

positive and negative side of relationships. It is through this visibility of their lived experiences which drives my commitment to these areas in future research.

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